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A week after the Middle East declared a polio emergency in the region, mass vaccination against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases under way

Geneva, New York, 8 November – The largest-ever consolidated immunization response in the Middle East is under way to stop a polio outbreak, aiming to vaccinate over 20 million children in seven countries and territories repeatedly.

Emergency immunization campaigns in and around Syria to prevent transmission of polio and other preventable diseases have vaccinated more than 650 000 children in Syria, including 116 000 in the highly-contested north-east Deir-ez-Zor province where the polio outbreak was confirmed a week ago.

In a region that had not seen polio for nearly a decade, in the last 12 months poliovirus has been detected in sewage samples from Egypt, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The outbreak of paralytic polio among children in Syria has catalysed the current mass response. The first polio outbreak in the country since 1999, it has so far left 10 children paralyzed, and poses a risk of paralysis to hundreds of thousands of children across the region. Preliminary evidence indicates that the poliovirus is of Pakistani origin and is similar to the strain detected in Egypt, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Dr Ala Alwan, the World Health Organization Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean noted, “The Middle East has shown exactly the coordinated leadership needed to combat a deadly virus: a consolidated and sustained assault on a vaccine-preventable disease and an extraordinary commitment to a common purpose.”

[Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#)

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