



WHO Representative in Afghanistan Dr Luo Dapeng vaccinating children against measles in a mobile clinic in Baba Wali village of Kandahar province.

With more than 20 years' experience on the ground in Afghanistan, WHO's polio eradication programme continues to leverage its extensive operational capacity to deliver better health outcomes for all Afghans, including providing vital support to the recent nationwide measles vaccination campaign.

Measles outbreaks were reported across Afghanistan throughout 2022, with more than 5000 cases and an estimated 300 deaths reported by November. Complications from the measles virus include severe diarrhoea and dehydration, pneumonia, ear and eye complications, encephalitis or swelling of the brain, permanent disability and death. Most cases are children under the age of 5 years. There is no treatment for measles; the only reliable protection is vaccination.

While a series of subnational measles vaccination campaigns took place in 2022, reaching approximately 3 million children in 141 districts, the nationwide campaign from November 26 to December 5 represented the first national measles drive since the political transition in August 2021. The campaign covered 329 districts in all 34 provinces, vaccinating 5.36 million children aged between 9 to 59 months against measles; 6.1 million children between 0 to 59 months received oral polio vaccine.

WHO's polio eradication programme has significant reach in Afghanistan, with a presence in every district in the country. The polio programme leveraged this presence to recruit vaccinators, organize vaccination sites and train campaign staff. Through longstanding relationships with local authorities, the polio programme assisted in the selection of local schools, clinics, or mosques to serve as vaccination sites. The programme's established relationships with health institutions and communities also enabled polio staff to recruit local health workers and other staff to fill the roles of measles vaccinators and provide training. Sharing their experience of implementing polio vaccination campaigns helped the measles vaccinators to prepare and plan for the task ahead.

The detection of measles cases and collection of data by WHO's extensive polio surveillance network also played a crucial role in providing evidence-based planning for the campaign. Furthermore, WHO's polio programme provided logistical support, transporting measles and polio vaccines, and ensuring the cold chain was maintained and vaccines were delivered to every district. Polio staff played additional roles in campaign monitoring and supervision.

"Measles is a highly contagious disease. WHO Afghanistan is very proud of its work in

immunizing and protecting children against both measles and polio in this campaign," said Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative in Afghanistan. "I am very grateful to all health workers, partners and donors who made this possible."

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