

Muscat, Oman, 4 September 2014 - Key World Health Organization (WHO) staff dedicated to the global fight of eradicating polio ended a three-day meeting in Muscat, Oman, today. The meeting discussed ways to prevent outbreaks in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa and to stop transmission of this crippling and potentially deadly disease in the endemic countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Representatives from across the Eastern Mediterranean Region acknowledged difficulties faced at country level in implementing programmes and identified new tactics to focus efforts on stopping transmission in the coming months, including in Somalia, Syria and Iraq, countries which have recently faced new outbreaks.

"We are facing a nine-month period of intensified activity and in all of our zones of operation we are planning how best we can support the implementation of programmes to effectively put a stop to polio," said WHO's Manager of Polio Eradication and Emergency Support in the Region Chris Maher.

The group of more than 40 WHO officials, mostly medical staff, identified a number of actions to prioritize operational activities targeting high-risk populations in infected and at-risk countries. The WHO secretariat also discussed issues such as strengthening routine immunization, introduction of injectible inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), surveillance and data, risk assessment, access to hard-to-reach areas and populations, communications and advocacy, among other topics.

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