



Khartoum, 8 September 2020 – Children in Sudan have been confirmed to have contracted circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2). This strain of poliovirus is a result of low immunity and under-immunization of communities, rather than a problem with the vaccine.

In August 2020, the Africa Regional Certification Commission certified the WHO African Region as wild polio-free after 4 years without a case. With this historic milestone, 5 of the 6 WHO regions – representing over 90% of the world's population – are now free of wild poliovirus, moving the world closer to achieving global polio eradication. Sudan's last reported wild poliovirus case was in March 2009 and the country was announced polio-free in 2015 by WHO. Yet it has been considered at high risk for importation of polioviruses for several years due to a decline in population immunity resulting from insecurity and conflict in certain areas.

The detection of cVDPV2 – a different virus strain to wild poliovirus – in Sudan does not threaten these important milestones.

According to the Federal Ministry of Health, 10 states are affected: East Darfur, Gedarif, Blue Nile Gezira, Kassala, Red Sea, River Nile, South Darfur, West Darfur and White Nile. The virus has also been isolated from 3 sewage samples in Khartoum.

UNICEF and WHO are working together with the Federal Ministry of Health and partners to support the Government's response to the outbreak to ensure every child under 5 years of age is vaccinated with oral polio vaccine. At least 2 rounds of vaccination are planned in order to offer children the best protection. Vaccinators will aim to provide polio drops to 8.6 million children under 5 in all 18 states of Sudan in October, and again in November.

The re-emergence of polio in Sudan is a public health emergency: the presence of just one infected child places children across the country and even beyond Sudan's borders at incredible risk. The vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 detected in Sudan is genetically linked to an outbreak in neighbouring Chad, indicating cross-border spread. The 2 countries are working together to synchronize activities to end the outbreaks.

"Sudan remains at high risk of further virus spread because of large numbers of people moving throughout the country. There are large numbers of internally displaced persons moving from areas of conflict in a number of states, in addition to frequent movement between neighbouring countries. The polio programme has also worked to map nomadic populations, who are also considered at risk, to ensure that they can be reached with the vaccine during the campaign," said Dr Ni'ma Saeed Abid, WHO Representative in Sudan.

"WHO highlights the importance of working proactively to protect all Sudanese against vaccine-preventable diseases through strengthening routine immunization and regular vaccination campaigns to ensure high population immunity," he said.

"Polio vaccination is a genuine right of each and every child, we will work together with government and partners to join hands to ensure girls and boys are reached and protected wherever they are," said Abdullah Fadil, UNICEF representative in Sudan.

“Polio is a highly infectious disease that mainly affects young children, we urge parents to complete their children’s vaccination schedules as recommended,” he said. “Partnering with communities and securing their participation in immunization is of paramount importance and key for success to eradicate polio, they should be actively engaged and kept informed to ensure sustainable achievement and that no child is missed,” he adds.

All children who are not fully vaccinated are vulnerable to polio. Children who live in remote areas or in conflict-affected communities in Sudan do not always have access to routine vaccination. In these marginalized and underserved communities, already lacking basic resources like water and basic health care, children are often reached only through targeted polio vaccination campaigns and through periodic mobile immunization services. This outbreak underlines the importance of strong routine immunization systems, in addition to supplementary vaccination activities, to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases. Every child should be vaccinated.

Related link

[Disease Outbreak Notification for cVDPV2 in Sudan](#)

Note to Editors

- The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a consortium that includes UNICEF, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is working closely with the Federal Ministry of Health to swiftly respond to the newly detected outbreak with standard response activities including mass vaccination campaigns to protect children at risk of polio and prevent further spread of the virus.

- In 2019, UNICEF provided the Federal Ministry of Health with the requested quota of polio vaccines, including 7.1 million doses of the oral polio vaccine for routine vaccination activities, and 13.5 million doses of oral polio vaccines for a campaign reached 7.6 million children during April nationwide round and 4.5 million children during in the high-risk localities during December 2019. However, in 2020 thousands of children missed out on vaccinations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health system and communities.

- WHO is working with Ministry of Health Sudan and partners to enhance and sustain the

acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance system to ensure continued detection of any polioviruses among 18.6 million children under 15, increase technical capacity of health workers, develop bottom up micro planning and ensure effective monitoring of vaccination activities. The WHO is also working closely with neighbouring countries of Sudan to increase cross-border coordination.

- Continued commitment to strengthening immunization and disease surveillance systems in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and African regions is essential to protect progress against wild polio and to tackle the spread of circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses.

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About UNICEF Sudan

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About WHO Sudan

The World Health Organization in Sudan works in close collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health and partners to support the country in reaching its national health development goals and to ensure that all health efforts are coordinated.

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