

Statement by the Eastern Mediterranean Ministerial Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

Delivering on a promise: achieving and sustaining a polio-free Eastern Mediterranean Region

Fifth Meeting of the Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

14 June 2022

Noting the progress achieved globally in eradicating poliovirus transmission since 1988;



Noting with deep concern the ongoing and expanding outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in the Region, including an outbreak of cVDPV2 in Somalia and concurrent outbreaks of cVDPV1 and cVDPV2 in Yemen;

Recognizing the high risk of expansion of the polio outbreaks in these countries due complex emergency settings, limited access to high-risk populations, weak immunization services and gaps in coverage of supplementary vaccinations campaigns;

Recalling that the spread of polio is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (2005);

Recognizing the impact of prolonged conflict on disruption of health services, including disruption of house-to-house vaccination campaigns that ensure all vulnerable children can be

reached with life-saving polio vaccines;

Observing with alarm the prolonged cVDPV2 outbreak in Somalia and increasing cases of cVDPV2 in Yemen;

Noting the fast-approaching timeline of the global Polio Eradication Strategy 2022–2026 – Delivering on a Promise to secure a lasting world free of all forms of poliovirus, including circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses, within the next 18 months;

Appreciating and supporting the decision of the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean to formally grade all polio emergencies and apply relevant emergency standard operating procedures to WHO operations to address polio emergencies;

We, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks:

DECLARE:

1. The ongoing circulation of any strain of poliovirus in the Region is a Regional Public Health Emergency;

COMMIT TO:

2. Mobilizing all needed engagement and support by all political, community and civil society leaders and sectors at all levels to finally end polio as a Regional Public Health Emergency;

3. Advocating for increased access to all hard-to-reach populations, including inaccessible and nomadic communities and internally displaced persons who are most at-risk, to strengthen their immunity and enhance detection of poliovirus circulation;

4. Providing all needed resources and highest-level oversight to the Government of Somalia and Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners to fully implement the Somalia Polio Eradication

Action Plan 2022 launched at the Somalia Summit in March 2022, in the context of competing health response priorities such as ongoing drought and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic;

5. Supporting Yemen in mobilizing all necessary resources to fully implement outbreak response across the country, and advocating for all children to be reached through house-to-house or intensified site-to-site vaccination campaigns;

6. Helping to strengthen coordination with other public health and humanitarian efforts in Somalia and Yemen, to ensure closer integration in particular with routine immunization and delivery of essential health services to children; and

REQUEST:

7. The international humanitarian and development communities to scale up their support for providing essential services, including a robust response to the polio outbreaks in Somalia and Yemen;

8. The authorities and polio eradication partners in Somalia to accelerate high-quality and rigorous implementation of the Somalia Polio Eradication Action Plan 2002, to stop the longest-running outbreak in the country and prevent further spread of cVDPV2 by the end of 2022;

9. The national authorities and the Regional Polio Eradication programme to strengthen cross-border coordination for Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, considering the high risk of the cVDPV2 virus crossing international borders;

10. All authorities in Yemen to facilitate resumption of house-to-house vaccination campaigns in all areas to ensure delivery of vaccine to the youngest and most vulnerable children, who are likely to be missed by delivery of vaccine through health facilities alone. In areas where house-to-house vaccination is not feasible, all efforts should be made to implement intensified fixed-site vaccination to ensure high coverage;

11. The Regional Director to continue his tremendous leadership and efforts to support the

cessation of polio outbreaks in Yemen, including by advocating for all necessary financial and technical support, reviewing progress, implementing corrective actions as necessary, and regularly informing Member States of the aforementioned and of any eventual further action required, through the World Health Organization Executive Board, World Health Assembly and Regional Committee.

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