

Global Immunization

World Polio Day 2020

About Polio

Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a crippling and potentially deadly infectious disease caused by the poliovirus that invades the brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis. The virus spreads from person to person and only affects humans; children are especially susceptible. Because polio has no cure, vaccination is the only way to protect children and stop the disease from spreading.



Along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, health-workers provide polio vaccination each month to tens of thousands of children for free, no matter their nationality. [Photo: UNICEF]

World Polio Day (October 24) provides an opportunity to highlight global efforts toward a polio-free world and honor the tireless contributions of those on the frontlines in the fight to eradicate polio from every corner of the globe. Through the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), CDC works with partners to eradicate polio and end the suffering from this

devastating disease. Stopping polio in all forms will require us to be resilient, adapt and innovate to deliver a polio-free world.

Resiliency and Innovation in the Face of Challenges

This year the polio program has marked inspiring and important milestones, developments and challenges for advancing progress toward polio eradication, including:

- Certification of the African Region as wild poliovirus-free in August
- Testing and preparation for the introduction of novel oral poliovirus type 2 vaccine (nOPV2), a new tool to stop outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2).
- Supporting many countries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic with frontline disease detectives, data collection and analysis, risk communication and training
- Resumption of polio activities following a pause to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 and protect health workers and communities

Wild Poliovirus in Two Remaining Countries – Pakistan and Afghanistan

CDC and polio partners are adapting polio eradication efforts to mitigate the obstacles presented by COVID-19. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the last stronghold of the wild poliovirus, several critical challenges stand in the way of achieving eradication, including the global pandemic.

- The COVID-19 pandemic mitigation efforts in Afghanistan halted polio vaccination campaigns for five months, compounding existing barriers to vaccine access and further increasing the number of at-risk children. [During January – July 2020, 41 wild poliovirus cases were reported compared with 15 during the same period in 2019.](#) In addition, a recent outbreak of cVDPV2 has resulted in 69 cases so far in 2020.
- Similarly in Pakistan, the number of reported wild poliovirus cases has increased, as have the number and geographic spread of cVDPV2 outbreaks in 2020.

Substantial efforts to address programmatic challenges – strengthening data quality, campaign quality and community engagement – in these last two endemic countries are essential to safely restore and scale-up polio field activities.

Wild Poliovirus-Free – Africa Kicks Out Wild Polio

On August 25, 2020, the [African Region was officially certified as wild poliovirus-free](#). With the African region's certification, five of the six WHO regions – representing over 90% of the world's population – are now free of the wild polioviruses. While we celebrate this Africa-led public health achievement, the polio program remains focused on defeating polio in all its forms.

Despite substantial progress toward polio eradication made over the last decade, outbreaks of cVDPV2 have recently been steadily increasing, with most of these outbreaks occurring in Africa. As of October 7, 2020, there were 441 cases worldwide, compared to 378 and 71 cases globally in all of 2019 and 2018 respectively.

CDC has played a pivotal role for three decades in supporting African countries and the continent to reach the wild polio-free milestone, and we remain committed to ensuring the program is resilient to respond to emerging and new

challenges, including stopping cVDPV2 outbreaks while mitigating the risk of COVID-19. The GPEI is preparing for the introduction of novel oral poliovirus vaccine (nOPV2) to respond to cVDPV outbreaks in Africa and will work closely with countries to support supply and demand for vaccine, rollout and high campaign coverage in at-risk populations.

A win against polio is a win for global health

This World Polio Day, CDC and partners are more resolved than ever to defeating polio. In partnership through GPEI and with other global immunization and national partners, we remain committed to the safe resumption of suspended polio activities, the steady and sustainable recovery of lost ground, and finally removing the remaining barriers to protecting every child from all forms of polio.

Feature Story



Polio Eradication Proves Trusted Partner in Fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) program, including CDC, is drawing on years of experience fighting outbreaks and reaching underserved communities to support governments as they prepare and respond to COVID-19.

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Digital Media



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Share facts about polio on World Polio Day

On The Web



[Africa Kicks Out Wild Polio](#)



[Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#)

 [Progress Toward Poliomyelitis Eradication — Afghanistan, January 2019–July 2020](#)
(*Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*)

 [The Long and Winding Road to Eradicate Vaccine-Related Polioviruses !\[\]\(eebbd3dc1abeccf4c1e5751ec03fc559_img.jpg\)](#)
(*Journal of Infectious Diseases*)

 [Update on Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus Outbreaks – Worldwide, July 2019–February 2020](#)
(*Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*)

 [Progress Toward Polio Eradication — Worldwide, January 2018–March 2020](#)
(*Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*)