

**Government of Pakistan**  
**Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Polio virus attacks two more Pakistani children in Bajour**

*Islamabad, 31 October 2018* - The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) for Polio Eradication in Islamabad has notified two new polio cases from Bajour tribal district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bringing the total number of polio cases in the country to eight this year. "The identification of new cases is yet another reminder that long as poliovirus exists anywhere in the country, no child is safe from being infected," said Dr. Rana Muhammad Safdar, National Coordinator for Polio Eradication in Pakistan.

According to the details shared by the NEOC, the virus detected from sewerage samples in Bajour during last few months managed to infect a five-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy. The poliovirus was isolated from the stool samples of both children presenting with atypical symptoms of facial palsy and slight weakness as the multiple doses of Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) had boosted their immunity.

"Vaccinating all children in every campaign is important to attain full immunity against the polio virus" said Dr. Safdar. "Fortunately, children who are vaccinated against polio multiple times are able to fight the virus back. The more doses of the polio vaccine a child receives, the higher the chances of escaping lifelong paralysis," he added.

According to Dr. Safdar, children who are not vaccinated against polio or have not received enough doses of the vaccine to fight off the virus are at far greater risk of developing lifelong paralysis or even dying.

"There is no cure for polio once the damage is done. On the other hand we do an effective vaccine to prevent this from happening" said Dr. Safdar. "It is entirely safe to give multiple doses of the vaccine, in fact that is how the vaccine is designed. More doses will offer better protection against poliovirus, and that is why it is important that all children – regardless of vaccination status – are reached every time, during each vaccination round."

Pakistan remains one of the three last countries in the world, alongside Afghanistan and Nigeria, where polio continues to circulate. Over the past years, the country has achieved tremendous progress in the polio situation. Wild poliovirus cases have declined from 20,000 per year in the early 1990's, when the polio eradication efforts started, to only eight last year. Only between 2014 and 2017, the number of wild poliovirus cases reported from Pakistan dropped by 97%. So far in 2018, a total of eight polio cases have been reported including three cases from the Dukki district in Balochistan, one from Karachi, one from Charsadda district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one from Khyber tribal district of KP and two cases from Bajour tribal district of KP. Of these eight cases, five children were vaccinated multiple times which protected them from developing lifelong paralysis, including the two most recent cases from Bajour tribal district in KP. Meanwhile, the three children from Dukki district, Balochistan, were severely under-immunized and hence, did not develop immunity against the virus: two of them got paralyzed for life, and one child – an 18-month old boy – died as a result of paralysis of the breathing muscles.

"Thanks to the cooperation of majority of the parents, the virus is fighting for its survival now and trying to find un-vaccinated or under vaccinated children all the time. To eradicate polio, we will need to immunize every child, so that the virus has nowhere to go. While the "last mile" has proven to be the toughest phase of polio eradication, this is the best opportunity for Pakistan to end polio transmission imminently," said Babar Bin Atta, the Prime Minister's Focal Person on Polio Eradication.

“The next door to door polio vaccination campaign in selected districts will be from 12-15 November, while the next country-wide campaign will be from 10-13 December. We are making best preparations to wipe the virus off and it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that two drops of the safe and effective polio vaccine are administered to all children under the age of five both in routine as well as the special door to door campaigns”, Babar said.

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