

POLIO SITUATION WORLDWIDE IN 2008 - UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS TOWARDS GLOBAL ERADICATION

Eurosurveillance editorial team (eurossurveillance@ecdc.europa.eu)¹

1. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Stockholm, Sweden

According to a recent communication in the World Health Organization (WHO) Weekly epidemiological record [1], a total of 1,655 wild polio virus (WPV) cases were reported worldwide in 2008, which represents an increase of 26% compared to 2007 when 1,315 cases were reported globally. In 2008, 91% of all polio cases occurred in the four countries where polio is still endemic: Nigeria (801 cases), India (559), Pakistan (118), Afghanistan (31). The remaining 146 cases were reported from 14 countries with cases of imported WPV. The number of WPV type-1 cases increased from 321 in 2007 to 984 in 2008, whereas the number of WPV type-3 cases decreased from 994 in 2007 to 671 in 2008.

Efforts have been made to eliminate WPV transmission since 1988 when the WHO began its global eradication campaign. Since then, the incidence of polio has decreased significantly. In 1988 there were still around 350,000 cases in 125 countries worldwide whereas in the past years global figures amounted to less than 2,000. Furthermore, no circulation of WPV type-2 has been documented since October 1999 [2].

The 26% increase in WPV transmission in 2008 compared to 2007 is mainly caused by an increase in cases in Nigeria (2007: 285; 2008: 801). During the second half of 2008, WPV1 originating from northern Nigeria spread to eight neighbouring African countries, including six that were free of polio since 2005. The most recent data available show that the global vaccination rate of infants with three doses of the trivalent oral polio vaccine (OPV3) was estimated at 82% in 2007. The vaccination rates for the four polio-endemic countries are 83% in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 62% in India, and 61% in Nigeria. Nevertheless, in some parts of the countries, OPV3 coverage was below 40%.

In response to the ongoing transmission and increasing number of cases in Nigeria and the spread of the disease to countries that had been polio-free for more than a decade such as Uganda, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) launched on 8 April 2009 an emergency appeal to support Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from 14 countries in Africa to respond to WPV outbreaks across the continent. The related activities will support massive immunisation campaigns currently taking place or being planned in all affected countries. More than 41 million children throughout Africa will be immunised against polio in April and 42 million children from Nigeria will be immunised in May [3].

References

1. Progress towards interrupting wild poliovirus transmission worldwide, 2008. World Health Organization (WHO). Wkly Epidemiol Rec. 2009;84(14):110-6. Available from: <http://www.who.int/wer>
2. Global Polio Eradication Initiative. The History. Geneva: Global Polio Eradication Initiative. [accessed 16 April 2009]. Available from: <http://www.polioeradication.org/history.asp>
3. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Polio outbreak in 14 African countries prompts IFRC emergency appeal. Geneva: IFRC; 2009 Apr 8. Press Release. Available from: <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/pr09/1609.asp>

This article was published on 16 April 2009.

Citation style for this article: Eurosurveillance editorial team. Polio situation worldwide in 2008 - update on the progress towards global eradication. Euro Surveill. 2009;14(15):pii=19178. Available online: <http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=19178>