

# NOW, MORE THAN EVER: STOP POLIO FOREVER.



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## **Asian and North African countries close to ending polio, announce accelerated plans to quickly 'mop-up' new cases**

*West and central African countries announce emergency strategies to get back on track following outbreak*

Asian and North African countries could be polio-free within months, while west and central African countries must change track to stop the virus, according to data presented in Geneva today by Health Ministers from the world's six remaining polio-endemic countries. The ministers announced a two-pronged strategy to further accelerate eradication activities in both areas.

With latest figures showing the Asian and north African regions at record low levels of polio (together reporting only 21 cases in 2004, compared to 94 this time last year), ministers of health of Afghanistan, Egypt, India, and Pakistan announced an accelerated strategy to "mop-up" each new virus. Under this ambitious initiative, each new poliovirus found will trigger two massive, tailored immunization campaigns in response, targeting between one and five million children, before the virus has the opportunity to spread.

Mr. M. N. Khan, Federal Minister of Health, Pakistan, said: "President Musharraf himself has endorsed the accelerated mop-up strategy. We will finish the job this year."

With the all-time low levels of polio in Egypt, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, four of the six remaining endemic countries are on track to meet the end-2004 target for stopping polio – a date set by endemic country governments on 15 January at the signing of the "Geneva Declaration for the Eradication of Poliomyelitis."

But countries in west and central Africa, particularly Nigeria and Niger, will need different strategies to bring the regional eradication initiative into line with the progress in the Asian region this year. After making the most rapid progress of any region in the world, west and central Africa suffered a significant setback, due to the outbreak which originated in northern Nigeria where immunization campaigns have been suspended since August 2003.

The new strategy for the African region includes the reintroduction of a mass, synchronized immunization campaign across 21 countries by early 2005 at the latest. This strategy will be supplemented, where appropriate, with mop-up campaigns around any importations.

Recognizing that the northern Nigerian state of Kano has yet to resume immunization activities, Professor Eytayo Lambo, Minister of Health, Nigeria, informed the meeting: "This month, an understanding was reached and signed between Kano state government and federal authorities on the required conditions for re-starting the polio immunization activities in Kano. As these conditions are now being met, we have made preparations to support full catch-up immunization campaigns in Kano, ahead of the nation-wide activities in September, October and November."

The spearheading partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative warned that the spread of virus from Kano across west and central Africa already cost US\$ 25 million for emergency campaigns in 2003 alone, in response to these re-infections. The further intensification of activities will result in significant additional costs.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF. The poliovirus is now endemic in only six countries, down from over 125 when the Global Polio Eradication Initiative was launched in 1988. The six countries with indigenous wild poliovirus are: Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Niger, Afghanistan and Egypt.

The polio eradication coalition includes governments of countries affected by polio; private foundations (e.g. United Nations Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); development banks (e.g. the World Bank); donor governments (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America); the European Commission; humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations (e.g. the International Red Cross and Red Crescent societies) and corporate partners (e.g. Aventis Pasteur, De Beers, Wyeth). Volunteers in developing countries also play a key role; 20 million have participated in mass immunization campaigns.

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For further information on the *Global Polio Eradication Initiative*, please see [www.polioeradication.org](http://www.polioeradication.org), Rotary International's PolioPlus site at <http://www.rotary.org/foundation/polioplus/>, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), or the polio site on [www.unicef.org/polio](http://www.unicef.org/polio)