Figures Talk
Polio outbreak in Ukraine

What is polio?
- Polio is a highly infectious and sometimes fatal disease caused by virus that invades the nervous system.
- The polio virus spreads from person to person via faeces and saliva especially in contaminated food and water.
- Polio mainly affects children under five. But can paralyze of kill a child of any age if not fully vaccinated.
- There is no cure for polio, but it can be prevented by immunization. Polio vaccine, given multiple times, can protect a child for life.

Is a polio outbreak confirmed in Ukraine?
- Yes. This has been confirmed by WHO and CDC - the world's top authorities in polio surveillance on the basis of laboratory findings from Ukraine.
- Two cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus have been confirmed in stool samples from children in Zakarpatty region. These two children, one aged four years and the other 10 months, were not vaccinated against polio and became paralysed after contracting the virus. This virus has been in circulation for quite some time and in the meantime has mutated – changed – becoming a threat to all non-immunised children in Ukraine.
- The polio outbreak occurred because of the chronically low immunization coverage in the country. Less than 50% of children were un- or under-immunized in 2014, and in 2015 the level of immunization against polio among children under 1 year of age has dropped further to 14%.
- At least 95% of children should be vaccinated to ensure community immunity.
What happens in a polio outbreak?

- One in every 200 persons infected with polio virus are paralyzed for life. Others have no symptoms but can still pass on the disease.
- Among those paralyzed, 5%-10% die when their breathing muscles are immobilized by the virus.
- In 2010, during the last polio outbreak in Europe in Tajikistan the virus killed 29 children and left more than 480 people paralyzed. The disease spread to Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan with 18 identified cases and one death.

What needs to be done to stop the outbreak in Ukraine?

- 3.3 million children under 6 must be vaccinated in two rounds of immunisation activities in response to the outbreak.
- It should be followed by one round of immunization activities for children under 10 reaching estimated 4.9 million children.
- Routine immunization must ensure 500,000 new-borns are vaccinated annually with three doses of polio vaccine during their first year of life.

Could polio in Ukraine threaten other countries?

- Yes. The polio outbreak in Ukraine or indeed anywhere in an age of global travel presents an international risk. Until polio is eradicated globally, there is always a threat of re-emergence.
- Worldwide, as many as 200,000 new cases could be seen every year, within 10 years, if polio is not eradicated from the last remaining strongholds.

How is the world fighting polio?

- The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) has reduced polio by 99% in the last 25 years, from 350,000 cases in 1988 to 243 cases in 2014.
- More than 10 million people are walking today who otherwise would have been paralysed.
- The global partners are mobilised to help Ukraine to fight polio.