

July 31, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

We are halfway through the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's (GPEI) 2013-2018 Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan. GPEI just completed a midterm review and this letter outlines key highlights and actions from the review.

Stop all wild poliovirus (WPV) transmission by the end of 2014 and any new outbreaks due to WPV or a circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) within 120 days (Objective 1)

- **Findings:** The 2014 deadline was missed and many countries remain at high risk for outbreaks. The review identified multiple subnational surveillance gaps, suboptimal quality of supplementary immunization activities (SIAs) in many areas, and a lack of prompt and aggressive response to outbreaks.
- **Recommendations:** Countries should strengthen surveillance capacity and quality, improve SIAs with a focus on missed children, intensify social mobilization, and increase the capacity for rapid outbreak response.
- **What GPEI is doing:** GPEI is working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund regional offices to intensify surveillance and outbreak response training in high-risk countries and to improve SIA quality in countries with low immunity levels.

Strengthen immunization systems, introduce inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) and withdraw oral polio vaccine (OPV) (Objective 2)

- **Findings:** The introduction of IPV in a large number of countries in a short time period is challenging and is threatened by limited IPV supply. Uncertainties remain about the interruption of cVDPV2 transmission, which is needed to enable the switch from trivalent OPV to bivalent OPV. Greater clarity is needed in defining GPEI's role in strengthening immunization programs and the role of partners within the Global Vaccine Action Plan in leveraging polio assets post-eradication.
- **Recommendations:** GPEI should review and update existing guidelines for use of IPV in eradication activities, develop further contingency plans for the switch, and strengthen collaboration between polio initiatives and the broader immunization community at global and country levels.
- **What GPEI is doing:** GPEI is closely monitoring compliance with guidelines for use of IPV in SIAs and developing further contingency plans regarding the switch. On the global level, GPEI senior leadership is looking to strengthen collaboration and joint accountability for improving routine immunization alongside the broader immunization partnership. At the country level, polio staff continue to expand their engagement in surveillance and immunization efforts beyond polio.

Certify that all regions of the world are polio-free and ensure that all poliovirus stocks are safely contained (Objective 3)

- **Findings:** Countries have widely varying burdens and capacities to successfully implement the new Phase I requirements for poliovirus containment under the Global Action Plan III which was modified to accommodate the sequential withdrawal of OPV starting with type 2 in 2016.
- **Recommendations:** National government regulatory agencies and vaccine manufacturers must significantly accelerate their activities to meet timelines in the plan. GPEI should organize

regional containment implementation/certification workshops to help countries move forward with preparation to contain polioviruses.

What GPEI is doing: WHO is finalizing a scheme to certify containment in essential facilities, providing technical support to relevant regional and national authorities, and training experts to verify compliance.

Ensure that investments in polio eradication provide health dividends for years to come through legacy planning (Objective 4)

- **Findings:** Because of the heavy reliance of national immunization programs in some regions on polio funding and staffing, these programs are at risk in the mid- to long-term if essential polio functions and assets are not mainstreamed.
- **Recommendations:** Regions and countries with substantial polio assets need to plan which polio functions to retain for immunization programs and other key public health interventions, including surveillance and laboratory.
- **What GPEI is doing:** GPEI is engaging with countries that have substantial polio assets to discuss how their polio assets can be transitioned and continue to benefit their comprehensive immunization, public health infrastructure and prevention goals.

The financial implications of implementing the recommendations from the midterm review were also calculated, and financial scenarios were developed. Each scenario considers the impact of additional immunization campaigns, intensified surveillance, and staffing levels needed to achieve eradication. The biggest cost driver is additional campaigns if any further delays occur in interrupting transmission. The POB reviewed these scenarios and will determine further financial requirements through 2018 at our September meeting. Ensuring full funding is critical to ending polio as quickly as possible.

We are close to the finish line, but still have much work to do. Recommendations from the review allow countries and partners to focus on key issues and target activities. Thank you for your contributions to make the midterm review meaningful and productive to make sure GPEI is on the right track.

Through the work of countries and partners, and most of all, front-line staff, we will succeed.



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