

LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Guiding principles for [immunization activities during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- Polio Oversight Board [statement](#)
- WHO Director-General's daily [press conference](#) on 3 April 2020 included comments on polio
- Interim guidance for the [polio surveillance network in the context of Coronavirus](#)
- [Strategy](#) for the Response to Type 2 Circulating Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus 2020 - 2021

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

- The Wall Street Journal: [Coronavirus Fight Hinders Action Against Other Badly Disease in Poorer Nations](#)
- Science: [Pandemic brings mass vaccinations to a halt](#)
- PBS: [Bill Gates on where COVID-19 will hurt the most \(timestamp ~10:45\)](#)
- BMGF "The Optimist Blog" Q& A with Program Officer Dr Erin Stuckey on [GPEI's support for COVID-19 response](#).

POLIO ERADICATION & COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic response requires worldwide solidarity and an urgent global effort. Guided by its commitment to protecting the most vulnerable, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) has a public health imperative to ensure that its resources are used to support countries in their preparedness and response.

The G7 and G20 have repeatedly recognized the substantial contribution of polio infrastructure and resources towards the strengthening of health systems and global health security.

In addition to supporting local health priorities, and as they have done for acute crises such as natural disasters and outbreaks of other infectious diseases such as Ebola, the polio programme will continue to offer its tools, workforce and extensive laboratory and surveillance network to support countries as they respond to COVID-19.

The GPEI is also taking every step to ensure that it does not contribute to COVID-19 transmission. In line with this aim, the GPEI has paused preventive polio vaccination campaigns until July 2020 and recommended that all countries postpone polio outbreak response campaigns until at least June 2020. While necessary to save lives amid the global spread of COVID-19, we are deeply regretful that these disruptions will likely result in increased polio transmission and more children being paralyzed by the poliovirus.



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POLIO ASSETS AND PERSONNEL SERVING

COVID-19 RESPONSE

ENDEMIC COUNTRIES

AFGHANISTAN

- Over 3,750 polio social mobilizers of the UNICEF supported Immunization Communication Network (ICN) and additional community volunteers who report children with acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) in Afghanistan are now promoting handwashing and positive hygiene practices in communities to reduce transmission and exposure to COVID-19.
- Polio field staff are using their routine visits to health facilities, during which they check for children with AFP, to conduct surveillance for potential COVID-19 cases.
- Local radio stations throughout Afghanistan are featuring experts from the country's National Disease Surveillance and Response Department, which the WHO supports with technical assistance and implementation, for interactive and informative shows on COVID-19.

NIGERIA

- In Ogun and Lagos states, over 50 WHO polio programme medical staff are conducting contact tracing, integrated disease surveillance and data collection and analysis to mitigate the further spread of COVID-19,

using lessons learnt from their years battling the poliovirus.

- WHO Field Offices that are usually used for polio eradication coordination are currently doubling up as coordination hubs for WHO teams supporting the COVID-19 response. The programme is also lending phones, vehicles and administrative support to the COVID-19 effort.
- An extensive network of polio communication assets, including 20 000 Volunteer Community Mobilisers supported by UNICEF along with religious and traditional leaders, are working across Nigeria to promote handwashing and positive hygiene practices in communities to reduce transmission and exposure to COVID-19.

PAKISTAN

- Currently, polio staff are aiding efforts across the entire country, with a special focus on strengthening surveillance and raising awareness about COVID-19. Working side-by-side with the Government of Pakistan, within three weeks the team has managed to train over 280 surveillance officers while simultaneously supporting the development of a new data system that's fully integrated

with existing data management system for polio.

- UNICEF polio Communication for Development (C4D) teams are supporting national and provincial COVID-19 response efforts through national and sub-national polio emergency operation centres, in rolling out risk mitigation and community engagement strategy at all levels; development of awareness and training materials; and training and engagement with community mobilizers, religious leaders, media and local influencers.
- The national polio programme's newly established call center supported by UNICEF and the Gates Foundation is currently operating as a COVID-19 call center, and an additional 30 agents have been assigned to manage the increased call volume.
- WHO polio eradication personnel in Pakistan have been involved in contact tracing for suspect cases and in conducting active case searches in coordination with local health authorities. This includes following up on 72 individuals who returned to Pakistan from Iran.
- In Pakistan, polio staff have sensitized more than 6,000 health professionals through cascade trainings on COVID-19.

OUTBREAK COUNTRIES

CROSS-COUNTRY STOP PERSONNEL

Stop Transmission of Polio (STOP) participants deployed by the CDC are supporting COVID-19 response activities in 13 countries. Activities of STOP participants include: advocacy, on the job training to COVID-19 response personnel, conducting surveillance, and holding meetings and briefings on COVID-19.

ANGOLA

WHO polio eradication staff are involved in community engagement and sensitization regarding safety measures to prevent exposure to, and spread of, COVID-19. Additionally, the polio surveillance team in Luanda is helping to train health care staff on case management of COVID-19.

BENIN

WHO polio eradication staff have been repurposed to support the development of a COVID-19 epidemic preparedness plan, and UNICEF Polio C4D personnel are supporting the COVID-19 Task Force in risk communication.

CAMEROON

16,000 polio social mobilizers supported by UNICEF are promoting COVID-19 preventive messaging on handwashing and hygiene in communities.

CENTRAL AFRICAN

REPUBLIC

UNICEF and WHO polio personnel are actively engaged in the roll-out of a Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) strategy, which is a key pillar of the COVID-19 national plan. This includes supporting the Ministry of Health with weekly press conferences, mapping 30 radio and 5 TV stations for COVID-19 preventive messaging, and establishing a hotline and rumor tracking system.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF

THE CONGO

Polio staff in DRC are supporting the COVID-19 National Committee in rolling out COVID-19 preventive messaging and other community engagement tactics to mitigate the spread of the virus. Additionally, all preparations for upcoming polio campaigns in Kinshasa have been stopped, and polio eradication staff have

been repurposed to support the COVID-19 response.

SOMALIA

The CDC polio assignee to WHO is acting as the focal point for COVID-19 for WHO in Somalia. This position is coordinating investigations on suspect cases within the country, ensuring lab samples move from the field to the testing lab in Kenya, and creating COVID-19 Situation Reports for the WHO Somalia country office.

IVORY COAST

UNICEF Polio C4D personnel are engaged in supporting the development of key messaging and dissemination through various media platforms.

TOGO

Polio workers are supporting both polio campaigns and COVID-19 response activities at Togo's borders.

