

Dear polio eradication supporter,

I would like to extend a belated welcome to 2023. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) has had a busy start to this important year as we work toward interrupting all poliovirus transmission and delivering a healthier future for children around the world.

Promising progress in 2022 set the stage for success as we move into the new year. 10 of the 11 genetic lineages of wild poliovirus circulating in Pakistan in 2020 have now been stopped, and just seven districts in the southern part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are still considered endemic. Only two cases of wild polio were reported in Afghanistan last year, and in just one region of the country—vastly reducing the geographic footprint of the disease. Despite detections of variant poliovirus (cVDPV) in new geographies last year, significant progress was made in places with persistent outbreaks like Nigeria, which reduced its numbers of type 2 cVDPV cases by almost 90% between 2021 and 2022.

Since I visited Pakistan alongside fellow GPEI leaders in late November, progress has remained strong even amid new detections. Nationwide campaigns have been completed in both endemic countries, reaching millions of children with polio vaccines, including in difficult-to-access regions. And we know that this work remains vital: on March 17, the [first WPV1 case in almost six months was confirmed](#) from Bannu – one of seven remaining districts in Pakistan endemic for the wild virus. While no human transmission has been reported outside of these districts for over two years, children everywhere will remain at risk until eradication is achieved. I am confident that with continued global support for emergency response activities including rapid vaccination campaigns and high-quality surveillance efforts, we can ensure that this is one of the country's last cases.

In February, I joined my colleagues on a [trip to Mozambique](#), where we met with Prime Minister Adriano Afonso Maleiane and Minister of Health Dr. Armino Tiago and saw firsthand the country's progress against an outbreak of imported wild poliovirus that began in early 2022. Thanks to firm commitment and leadership across Mozambique's government, the situation is rapidly improving. Thousands of health workers have vaccinated more than 13 million children across the country (and [33 million](#) across southern Africa), disease surveillance has improved, and Mozambique has not seen a case of wild polio since August 2022. Still, the risk for further wild poliovirus spread remains high, and continued vaccination is of utmost importance.

At the same time, Mozambique is also responding to a dangerous outbreak of cholera fueled by ongoing flooding in the region. The delegation visited the recently established temporary Emergency Operations Center in Tete Province, which is being used to coordinate responses to both polio and cholera. The GPEI and our partners across the region continue to stand by and support the government of Mozambique in its efforts to put an end to these outbreaks.

Across the entire African continent, leaders are taking the necessary steps to halt ongoing outbreaks of variant poliovirus (cVDPV). In December, President of Senegal H.E. Macky Sall hosted [the Forum on Immunization and Polio Eradication in Africa](#), remobilizing Africa's leaders around the 2019 Addis Declaration on Immunization. Last month, Heads of State gathered for the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa to [revitalize their commitment](#) to immunization efforts, including a call to galvanize support for last-mile polio eradication efforts. And as of March 2023, almost 600 million doses of nOPV2, the novel oral polio vaccine that is proving to more sustainably stop outbreaks, have been delivered in more than 20 countries across Africa. At the same time, [recent detections of cVDPV2 in DRC and Burundi](#) demonstrate that a vaccine in a vial is of no use to a child – we must continue to improve vaccination coverage to keep children safe from these outbreaks.

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As we move through this pivotal year, the GPEI has two key areas of focus. First, we must remain fully committed to ending wild poliovirus transmission in the endemic countries. GPEI partners are poised to continue supporting affected country governments, who must keep polio high on their agendas if we wish to succeed. Second, GPEI partners will focus on reaching all children with polio vaccines in the [consequential geographies](#) for virus transmission. These few sub-national regions, where children are most likely to encounter and spread the virus, account for over 80% of today's variant polio outbreaks. Success here will have an outsized impact on efforts to wipe out all forms of poliovirus globally. To ultimately accomplish both goals, the global community must build and maintain the financial and political support needed to deliver a polio-free world.

In April, we will collectively celebrate [World Immunization Week](#). This year, it is more important than ever to emphasize how immunization rates across the board have declined, leading to disease outbreaks and a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases. It is critical to reinvigorate political attention and action on immunization to address the increasing number of outbreaks and backsliding in immunization rates.

We cannot let complacency drift in, not this close to the finish line. It would be a tragedy to tell future generations that we didn't eradicate this disease because it was too difficult. We thank you for your unyielding support. Onward together.

Best regards,



Christopher J. Elias, MD, MPH
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