

Dear polio eradication partner,

I would like to highlight several significant developments since my last update in June about the launch of the [new GPEI strategy](#) and my travels with GPEI leadership in Pakistan.

The GPEI is continuing to [actively monitor the developing situation](#) in Afghanistan. The safety of community vaccinators and program staff has always been – and will continue to be – a top priority. The GPEI remains committed to working with partners, the people of Afghanistan, and national and provincial authorities to continue the critical work of protecting all children across the country from polio and supporting the provision of other essential immunizations and health services.

In addition to interrupting wild poliovirus (WPV) transmission in the remaining endemic countries, ending outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) is also key to achieving a polio-free world. On 25 August 2021, the WHO African Region held a two-hour special session on polio during the 71<sup>st</sup> WHO Regional Committee for Africa, on the 1-year anniversary of the region's wild polio-free certification. The special session highlighted actions needed to secure urgent, high-quality cVDPV2 outbreak response and to ensure all children are protected against this vaccine-preventable disease.

I was honored to join this event, where Ministers of Health [reaffirmed their commitments](#) to urgently ending cVDPV2 outbreaks and protecting the region's [hard-won gains against WPV](#) to achieve a truly polio-free Africa. A new regional scorecard was presented to help track key indicators, for high-quality polio outbreak response, readiness to introduce the type 2 novel oral polio vaccine (nOPV2), and routine immunization strengthening.

As many of you have followed closely, nOPV2, which received WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) last fall, has successfully been rolled out in seven countries to date, six of which are in Africa. The vaccine's performance in the field has been regularly evaluated since its rollout began, and the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) will soon inform on potential next steps for nOPV2's use. In the meantime, given the continued march of the virus across the African continent, outbreak response cannot wait. As discussed in the AFRO regional event on polio, countries should use the type 2 vaccine available to them in 2021-22, particularly given nOPV2 supply constraints due to the impact of COVID-19 on manufacturing.

The special event was also an opportunity to hear more about the phased transition plans across the WHO African Region, where GPEI resources will be focused on support to 10 countries at highest risk of continued cVDPV2 transmission, while the implementation of polio transition will continue in the remaining 37 countries as planned. As WHO AFRO Regional Director Dr. Moeti noted, it is critical that the tools and expertise built to end polio in Africa are able to be integrated into health systems to protect communities against other health threats in the future as well.

The Polio Oversight Board (POB) met on 1 September to review the latest on the polio program's implementation in endemic and outbreak countries, including the evolving situation in Afghanistan;

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finance and resource mobilization priorities; and the implementation of the GPEI's 2022-2026 strategy and management structure. The POB will convene next in October to approve the budget required in 2022 to support the full implementation of the new strategy, as well as the resources needed to support additional critical work, such as the phased transition of polio infrastructure in the WHO African region.

Delivering on a promise of a polio-free world is not without challenges. The GPEI has a long history of adapting and innovating to overcome significant hurdles to ending polio, and with unwavering support of country governments, vaccinators, partners, donors – and supporters like you – I remain confident that we can finish the job.

Best regards,



Christopher J. Elias, MD, MPH

President, Global Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Chair, Polio Oversight Board, Global Polio Eradication Initiative

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