

Reactive talking points: Three-year-old paralyzed by polio in Bannu, Pakistan

- A **three-year-old male child was paralyzed by polio in Bannu**, the Pakistan National Polio Laboratory confirmed on March 16. This is the first case of wild poliovirus detected in Pakistan since September 2022 and the first case in 2023. The poliovirus isolate from the new case is genetically linked to the poliovirus detected in North Waziristan in 2022. The last case of polio from North Waziristan was reported on 15 September 2022.
- This is the **first detection of any wild poliovirus in Bannu** since 23 November 2022, when a WPV1 environmental positive was reported from a sewage sample. In 2022, 11 of the 37 positive environmental samples were reported from Bannu confirming the persistence of low-level transmission in the district.
- Bannu district has seen significant improvements in **campaign quality and community outreach**. Extensive outreach and community engagement activities have significantly reduced the number of refusals in the area.
- **Bannu is part of the seven polio endemic districts located in the southern area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** province that also include DI Khan, Lakki Marwat, North Waziristan, Upper and Lower South Waziristan, and Tank. No human transmission of wild poliovirus has been reported outside these districts since January 2021. However, children in these areas remain at high risk due to low routine immunization and gaps in coverage during vaccination campaigns..
- The programme is **conducting a detailed field investigation** to trace the origins of the virus and identify missed areas or populations to take corrective actions and stop the virus circulation.
- The **Pakistan Polio Program is well-prepared to aggressively respond to any outbreak**. Following recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group, the programme has streamlined its approach in responding to poliovirus detections as per categorization of risks based on the epidemiological trends.
- For the **seven polio-endemic districts**, a multi-dimensional plan is being implemented, keeping in view the complexity of diverse security and social challenges in the endemic zone. This includes an intensified vaccination schedule, continued enhancement of surveillance based on recommendations of the external review and granular analysis to understand sub-optimal performance and address identified gaps..
- The **second phase of the March nationwide polio campaign** will be held from April 03 to 07 to vaccinate more than 4.12 million children in 12 districts of Balochistan and 26

districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the seven endemic districts in the southern region of the province. So far, in January a nationwide polio campaign was conducted, reaching almost 44 million children while in February a subnational campaign vaccinated over 6 million children.

- **Pakistan's surveillance system, among the most sensitive in the world, maintains global standards** and continues to test samples from all 113 environmental sites every month. Surveillance is a key driver of the programme to detect, track and stop all polio. Timely detection of the virus has allowed the programme to mount a rapid and robust response, such as in February when a positive environmental sample was reported from Lahore.
- In the last phase of eradication, **poliovirus moves with mobile populations that are under immunized**, highlighting the importance of vaccination at borders and transit points. Last year, a new initiative was launched to reach high-risk mobile populations of nomads through special mobile teams deployed in the polio-endemic districts and neighboring districts of Punjab, brought nomadic children that were previously unreached, into the program's fold.
- While conditions in Pakistan and Afghanistan remain challenging, it is critical for both countries to continue working together to interrupt wild poliovirus transmission. **Both programmes continue to coordinate** to target high-risk populations, including communities straddling the borders, as well as nomads and seasonal workers, and coordinate the mapping and engaging of influential stakeholders along the shared border to increase community awareness and uptake of polio vaccinations.