SUDAN: Vaccine-derived polio outbreak - Flash Update No. 1

FLASH UPDATE (14 Aug 2020)

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The Government declared, on 9 August, an outbreak of poliomyelitis in Sudan, following the confirmation of two vaccine-derived poliovirus in South Darfur and Gedaref states.
- Tests also confirmed positive environmental samples of poliovirus type 2 in least nine states, according to WHO. More than 5.2 million children under age 5 live in the affected states and will require urgent vaccination.
- Neighbouring Ethiopia, Central African Republic and Chad also reported cases, which puts more risks on Sudan, especially Darfur region due to border movements.
- The Federal Ministry of Health and humanitarian partners have already activated the response, that will necessarily include mass immunization campaigns across the country.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) declared, on 9 August, an outbreak of polio in Sudan, following the confirmation of two cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus in South Darfur and Gedaref states. While laboratory tests are still ongoing, positive environmental samples of poliovirus type 2 have also been found in seven more states, including West Darfur, East Darfur, Gezira, White Nile, River Nile, Khartoum and Red Sea, indicating a possible wide circulation of the virus within the country. At least 5.2 million children under age 5 live in the affected states and will require urgent vaccination.

The outbreak, the first since March 2009, has been considered by the authorities as a national emergency and response has been activated to tackle the high risk of transmissions within and beyond Sudan, including South Sudan, declared by WHO as polio-free just a month ago. Neighbouring Ethiopia, Central African Republic and Chad also reported cases, which puts more risks on Sudan, especially in the Darfur region, due to border movements. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and current floods in Sudan will likely increase the challenges for Government and humanitarian partners to contain the new outbreak.

According to WHO, a vaccine-derived polio outbreak occurs in countries with low levels of immunization and poor sanitation conditions. When a child is immunized against polio, the weakened vaccine-virus replicates in the intestine and can be excreted in the environment. Although sometimes it can even offer protection to other children through ‘passive’ immunization, in some rare cases, after a long period of circulation, the vaccine-virus can genetically change into a form that can paralyze. Circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses must be managed in the same way as wild poliovirus outbreaks. The response must include vaccinating every child under age 5 with oral polio vaccine to stop transmission.

RESPONSE

Sudanese Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) and health partners have already activated the urgent response to the outbreak. The FMoH briefed the Cabinet of Ministers on 8 August and declared the outbreak one day later, following the protocols of the International Health Regulations. Risk assessments have already been completed, while a National Task Force committee is being currently established. Government and health partners, led by WHO, are in close contact with neighbouring countries to coordinate efforts.
For more information, please contact OCHA Sudan:

Saviano Abreu, deabreuisidoro@un.org

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