

Press Release

Acknowledging Bold Steps taken – and needed – to Save Somali Children from Polio

MOGADISHU, Somalia, 24 October 2018 – This World Polio Day, UNICEF and WHO are taking a moment to acknowledge the tremendous efforts made by the polio eradication workforce and partners over the last two decades in Somalia. By way of one recent example, UNICEF, WHO, health authorities and partners are working tirelessly to stop two concurrent outbreaks of vaccine-derived polioviruses that were confirmed late in 2017 in Somalia.

“Today, we face a persistent lack of access to children due to insecurity, population displacement driven by conflict and natural disasters, and a struggling health system, all of which have contributed to low immunization rates in children,” said Dr. Ghulam Popal, WHO Somalia Representative. “This has seen the emergence of polioviruses that are highly contagious and spread through poor hygiene. But a simple series of doses of the polio vaccine will protect a child for life.”

The theme for this year’s World Polio Day is ‘Bold Steps to End Polio’ which is exactly what Government and health workers are doing today: taking bold steps to control these outbreaks, ensuring all children have access to vaccines.

Somalia’s stakeholders are hopeful: they have seen the country stop polio outbreaks before and believe it can be done again.

“Every day, frontline workers are identifying children who need to be vaccinated, often in highly volatile areas,” said Steven Lauwerier, UNICEF Representative in Somalia. “They are knocking on doors in communities and visiting camps for the internally displaced to educate families on the benefits of polio immunization and to deliver vaccinations. These are the unsung heroes in the fight against polio.”

During the last immunization campaign, held nationwide earlier this month, the Government, alongside WHO, UNICEF and partners reached more than 2.6 million children with the oral vaccine. Polio teams are working hard to ensure children most vulnerable to missing vaccination are included in plans for the next nationwide campaign –that will run from 29 October to 1 November in Somalia. Boosting overall immunity of Somali children through multiple doses of the polio vaccine is the only way to stop the polioviruses currently in circulation.

As part of the response to the outbreaks, polio teams are reaching out to Somali communities and health partners for their support to look out for polio symptoms - including the sudden onset of floppiness and inability to move arms and legs - in children under 15 years of age. Children with these symptoms should be taken to the nearest health facility as soon as possible to receive timely attention.

WHO and UNICEF note that the biggest challenges to full coverage of the polio vaccine include ensuring all children from mobile and displaced communities are included in microplanning, improving overall hygiene in children, and reaching children in inaccessible areas. The likelihood that the current outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses can survive in areas where there is low

immunization uptake and lack of sanitation is high. As such the Government, WHO, UNICEF and health partners are calling for unimpeded and safe access to be able to vaccinate all eligible children in Somalia. Everyone has their own role to play in ending polio in Somalia.

Note to editors: See <http://polioeradication.org/news-post/vaccine-derived-polioviruses/> for additional information on circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

About WHO

The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations whose vision is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.

About GPEI

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, is a public-private partnership led by national governments and spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) working towards a future where no child will ever again be paralysed by polio.

For more information, please contact:

Dheepa Pandian, Chief of Communication, UNICEF Somalia
Email: dpandian@unicef.org Mogadishu Cell: +252 613375885 WA: +1-917-318-1624

Leilia Dore, Communications Officer, WHO Horn of Africa
Email: leiliadore@gmail.com Cell: +44 7521499274