

World Health Assembly 77

Statement by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

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Agenda item 14.4: Poliomyelitis

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Routine immunisation, including polio vaccination, was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Immunisation campaigns were suspended or cancelled, and a backslide in immunisation coverage left millions of children at risk. As a result, we have seen an upsurge in cases of vaccine-preventable diseases and a re-emergence of polio in places that had long been polio-free. This is a stark reminder of what will occur if we do not achieve global eradication – a global resurgence of transmission and polio-associated morbidity and mortality.

To achieve and maintain a world free of poliovirus, we must prioritise scale-up routine immunisation to reach the estimated 14.3 million zero-dose children worldwide, who have not received any vaccination in their lives in 2022.

We also need to recognise that most polio cases are in consequential sub-national geographies¹ which have the highest proportion of un-vaccinated and under-vaccinated children. This requires integrating routine immunisation, including polio vaccination, with other essential services for the populations left behind including through humanitarian and emergency responses.

Gavi, as a core partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, calls upon Member States to:

1. Ensure an integrated approach to reach zero-dose children and their communities with life-saving vaccination services and other primary health care interventions, especially in the seven subnational consequential geographies that are affected by broader humanitarian concerns and complex emergencies.

¹ Consequential geographies are “seven subnational areas around the world (eastern Afghanistan; southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan; Tete province and its hinterland in northern Mozambique; eastern Democratic Republic of Congo; northern Yemen; northern Nigeria; south-central Somalia). These areas share certain key programmatic characteristics: they feature some of the highest and most densely-populated proportions of zero-dose children (children who are either un- or under-vaccinated), and they are also affected by broader humanitarian, complex emergencies, including in some areas insecurity, meaning reaching these most marginalized and last-remaining under-vaccinated communities is all the more challenging”. Source: Polio Global Eradication Initiative: <https://polioeradication.org>.

2. Promote and accelerate the transition of essential polio and broader immunisation functions by integrating polio-funded assets into existing national health systems.