

## قرار

### Resolution

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

**EM/RC67/R.4  
October 2020**

**Sixty-seventh session  
Agenda item 8**

### **Galvanizing efforts to eradicate polio in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

The Regional Committee,

Having reviewed the report on eradication of poliomyelitis<sup>1</sup> and the proposal document on establishment of a Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks;<sup>2</sup>

Recalling World Health Assembly resolution WHA65.5 (2012) on intensification of the global poliomyelitis eradication initiative; Executive Board decision EB146(11) on intensified efforts to address circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2; the declaration of the international spread of poliovirus in 2014 as a public health emergency of international concern under the International Health Regulations (2005); and Regional Committee resolution EM/RC60/R.3 on the escalating poliomyelitis emergency in the Eastern Mediterranean Region;

Welcoming the certification of wild poliovirus eradication in the African Region and recognizing that the Eastern Mediterranean Region is now the only remaining region of WHO with endemic wild poliovirus type 1 transmission;

Noting with grave concern the marked increase of wild poliovirus in Afghanistan and Pakistan and significant emergence and importation of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 in the Region;

Concerned about the severe disruption to polio eradication efforts in the Region caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, including a four-month pause on all house-to-house polio campaigns and outbreak response campaigns, and recognizing the challenges posed by the pandemic to maintaining quality surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis in many countries and to implementing environmental surveillance for polioviruses;

Acknowledging the critical support that polio personnel, with their extensive experience of responding to outbreaks and other humanitarian emergencies and with trusted outreach networks in the most underserved communities, are providing to the national public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic in countries across the Region;

Acknowledging the extremely strong national and subnational political engagement in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in addressing COVID-19 while maintaining essential polio eradication functions as far as possible, and in planning to restructure and transform their respective national polio programmes as a key component of the broader health and economic COVID-19 recovery process;

<sup>1</sup> EM/RC67/INF.DOC.1.

<sup>2</sup> EM/RC67/17.

Welcoming the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) strategy to establish a GPEI hub at the WHO Regional Centre for Polio Eradication in Amman, Jordan, to be comprised of senior experts from GPEI partner organizations<sup>3</sup> who will provide well-coordinated and consolidated GPEI support for the implementation of national emergency action plans for polio eradication in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of the Polio Endgame Strategy 2019–2023;<sup>4</sup>

Noting the urgent need to resume and sustain polio vaccination activities safely and with appropriate infection prevention and control measures in the context of COVID-19 transmission, amid expanding poliovirus transmission in Afghanistan and Pakistan and outbreaks of vaccine-derived poliovirus in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, and the increased risk of importation or re-emergence of polioviruses in other countries in the Region;

Recognizing that supplementary immunization activities for polio eradication have strong potential to act as vital delivery mechanisms for other health services, including through integration with other health programmes, particularly the Expanded Programme on Immunization and the WHO Health Emergencies Programme;

Reiterating the urgent need to restore and strengthen critical functions related to acute flaccid paralysis and environmental surveillance, and to facilitate the movement of samples within and across countries in the Region, while continuing with existing commitments to establish environmental surveillance;

Noting the significant financial constraints facing the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, exacerbated by COVID-19, the additional investments needed to protect health workers and the anticipated increase in new polio cases, which is currently forcing a prioritization of activities to highest-risk areas and leaving children in other areas even more vulnerable to diseases such as polio;

Acknowledging the opportunities presented by the anticipated introduction of novel oral polio vaccine type 2 under the WHO Emergency Use Listing procedure, as per Executive Board decision EB146(11);

1. **REQUESTS** the Regional Committee to:

- 1.1 Endorse the establishment of a Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks to support intensified polio eradication efforts in the Region and: provide critical support to the remaining wild poliovirus endemic countries in the Region in their intensified polio eradication efforts; promote the establishment of essential health services in the multiple deprived communities where polio remains entrenched; facilitate access to vaccination of children in all areas; and report on status, progress and challenges on a yearly basis to the Regional Committee, Executive Board and World Health Assembly until regional certification of polio eradication has been successfully achieved (see terms of reference);
- 1.2 Encourage all Member States, particularly those affected by confirmed poliovirus transmission and those deemed at highest risk for polio re-infection and/or re-emergence, to identify health ministers to join the Subcommittee and act as advocates for and champions of polio eradication efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> The GPEI partners include the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rotary International and Gavi the Vaccine Alliance.

<sup>4</sup> Polio Endgame Strategy 2019–2023: eradication, integration, certification and containment. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (WHO/Polio/19.04; <http://polioeradication.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/english-polio-endgame-strategy.pdf>, accessed 2 September 2020). The strategy was presented to and noted by the Seventy-second World Health Assembly: A72/9. Polio eradication. Report by the Director-General. In: Seventy-second World Health Assembly, Geneva, 20–28 May 2019. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 ([https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA72/A72\\_9-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_9-en.pdf), accessed 2 September 2020).

2. **CALLS** on Afghanistan and Pakistan to:

- 2.1 Fully and urgently implement transformation and restructuring to ensure a functioning, fit-for-purpose polio programme to achieve rapid success, characterized by high-level national, provincial- and district-level engagement, with full support from the coordination and emergency management capacities established at all levels in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and adapting vaccination campaign operations to the COVID-19 reality; ensure strong community and caregiver engagement; and integrate vaccination and surveillance operations within broader public health sectors, notably response to other vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, by delivering multi-antigen interventions where possible;
- 2.2 Commit national and development partner resources to establish and strengthen sustainable essential health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene services in the multiple deprived communities where polio remains entrenched.

3. **URGES** all Member States to:

- 3.1 Express solidarity with Afghanistan and Pakistan in their efforts to eradicate poliomyelitis, through political support for the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks;
- 3.2 Based on prevailing epidemiology or risk status as regards circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2, fully implement the Strategy for control of cVDPV2 2020–2021, including urgent deployment of novel oral polio vaccine type 2, as appropriate, under the WHO Emergency Use Listing procedure, as per Executive Board decision EB146(11);
- 3.3 Strengthen disease surveillance and outbreak response planning to support integration of essential polio functions towards polio transition;
- 3.4 Support the planned regional expansion of environmental surveillance in strategically selected high-risk locations to supplement acute flaccid paralysis surveillance for prompt detection of polioviruses;
- 3.5 Mobilize and allocate adequate human and domestic financial resources towards interrupting transmission of all polioviruses, preventative immunization activities and polio outbreak preparedness and response, as per Executive Board decision EB146(11);
- 3.6 Prepare for a polio-free Region by implementing polio transition activities, in order to sustain a polio-free world after eradication of all polioviruses; strengthen immunization systems including surveillance for vaccine-preventable diseases; and strengthen emergency preparedness, detection and response capacity at country level, as per World Health Assembly document A71.9;<sup>5</sup>

4. **REQUESTS** the Regional Director to:

- 4.1 Continue his efforts to accelerate eradication efforts in the Region, including the mobilization of necessary financial and technical support, and to convene the inaugural meeting of the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks to support Afghanistan and Pakistan and other outbreak-affected Member States in their intensified polio eradication efforts, and inform Member States of the further action required;

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<sup>5</sup> A71.9. Polio transition and post-certification: draft strategic action plan on polio transition. Report by the Director-General. In: Seventy-first World Health Assembly, Geneva, 21–26 May 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018 ([https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA71/A71\\_9-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_9-en.pdf), accessed 2 September 2020).

- 4.2 Ensure the successful establishment of the GPEI Hub by providing all possible support to host senior expert staff from GPEI partner organizations at the WHO Regional Polio Eradication Centre in Amman, Jordan, and facilitating well-coordinated and consolidated GPEI support for the implementation of national emergency action plans for polio eradication in Afghanistan and Pakistan and of the Polio Endgame Strategy 2019–23;
- 4.3 Ensure that polio transition is a key priority for the Organization at all its levels; and mainstream best practices from polio eradication into all relevant health interventions and build capacity and responsibility for ongoing polio eradication functions and assets in national programmes, as per World Health Assembly decision WHA70(9).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Decision WHA70(9). Poliomyelitis: polio transition planning. In: Seventieth World Health Assembly, Geneva, 22–31 May 2017. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017 ([https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA70/A70\(9\)-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA70/A70(9)-en.pdf), accessed 2 September 2020).