

Current major event

Poliomyelitis in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR): Year 2020

The transmission of wild poliovirus type-1 (WPV1) continues in EMR only in the two polio-endemic countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan. As of week 53 2020, 140 WPV1 cases were reported (56 from Afghanistan and 84 from Pakistan). This compares with 176 cases in 2019 for the same period (29 from Afghanistan and 147 from Pakistan) (*see table*).

Editorial note

Polio is a highly infectious viral disease that mainly affects young children. Poliovirus is transmitted person-to-person and is spread mainly through the faecal-oral route, and less frequently by contaminated water or food. The virus then multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and cause paralysis in a small proportion of cases. Initial symptoms include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs, but when the disease causes paralysis, it is often permanent.

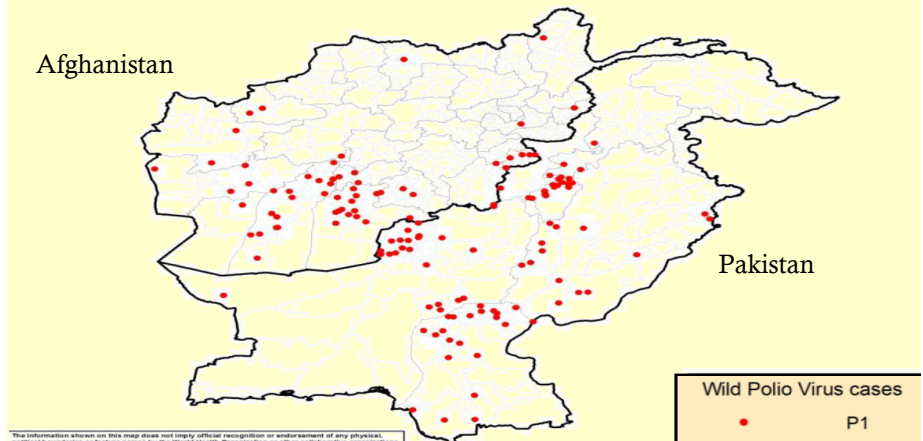
Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only two countries in the Region where polio is endemic. As of 31 December 2020, a total of 140 cases of polio due to WPV1 were reported in the Region: 56 from Afghanistan and 84 from Pakistan.

In Afghanistan, 38 cases came from the Southern Region, 8 from the Western Region, 6 from the Southeast Region, 2 from the Eastern Region, and one each from the Northern and Badakhshan Regions. In Pakistan 26 cases came from Balochistan province, 22 cases each from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Sindh provinces, and 14 from Punjab province (*see map*).

Other than the WPV1 cases in those two countries, five EMR countries reported circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses (cVDPVs) cases for a total of 422 cVDPV type 2 cases (240 from Afghanistan, 121 from Pakistan, 13 from Somalia and 48 from Sudan) and 13 cVDPV type 1 cases from Yemen.

Furthermore, 421 positive WPV1 environmental samples were detected in Pakistan, including 77 mixture of WPV1

Distribution of confirmed polio cases in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2020



Confirmed polio cases in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2014-2020

Year	Afghanistan	Pakistan
2014	28	306
2015	20	54
2016	13	20
2017	14	8
2018	21	12
2019	29	147
2020	56	84

and cVDPV2 and 4 mixtures of WPV1 and aVDPV2. In Afghanistan, a total of 35 positive WPV1 environmental samples were detected during 2020, including six combined (WPV1 and cVDPV2). Positive environmental samples were also detected in Egypt (1 positive environmental sample for cVDPV2) and Iran (2 positive environmental samples for cVDPV2).

The widespread isolation of the poliovirus from environmental samples suggests the risk of further spread and increased intensity of transmission remains high, unless timely and effected interventions are initiated.

There is no cure for polio, and it can only be prevented by immunization. Despite the ongoing mass vaccination interventions, the intensity of transmission of the disease especially in endemic countries of the Region does not appear to be subsiding.

Key barriers to the implementation of high quality vaccination campaigns include the ongoing conflict, community resistance, population movement, continuing ban by militants on immunization, and high level of insecurity encountered by polio workers in the most parts of the affected countries.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

COVID-19 in 22 EMR countries

Current public health events of concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2021

Afghanistan	[55 335 (2410), 4.4%]
Bahrain	[106 713 (379), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[5941 (63), 1.1%]
Egypt	[169 106 (9604), 5.7%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[1 459 370 (58 412), 4%]
Iraq	[627 416 (13 111), 2.1%]
Jordan	[333 855 (4304), 1.3%]
Kuwait	[170 036 (964), 0.6%]
Lebanon	[317 836 (3562), 1.1%]
Libya	[122 894 (1936), 1.6%]
Morocco	[474 966 (8381), 1.8%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[182 541 (2058), 1.1%]
Oman	[135 041 (1532), 1.1%]
Pakistan	[553 128 (11 914), 2.2%]
Qatar	[153 690 (250), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[369 961 (6397), 1.7%]
Somalia	[4854 (134), 2.8%]
Sudan	[29 634 (1831), 6.2%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[14 408 (947), 6.6%]
Tunisia	[216 176 (7162), 3.3%]
United Arab Emirates	[323 402 (914), 0.3%]
Yemen	[2131 (616), 28.9%]