



Polio Eradication in the African Region



World Health
Organization

African Region

POLIO GLOBAL
ERADICATION
INITIATIVE

Highlights (January - October 2024)

The African Region has remained steadfast in its commitment to eradicating all forms of polio, safeguarding children from the devastating effects of paralysis and death. In May 2024, following thorough assessments, an independent Polio Outbreak Response Assessment Team (OBRA) recommended the closure of the wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) outbreak in Malawi and Mozambique. This achievement reflects the dedication and unity of African governments, health workers, communities, and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), safeguarding the African Region's 2020 certification as indigenous wild poliovirus-free.

A significant advancement in the fight against polio came earlier in 2024, when the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) became the first WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) vaccine to receive full licensure and prequalification. The African Region is leading its deployment, with over a billion doses administered in the region since 2021.

To further strengthen polio eradication efforts, the WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO) is implementing a set of prevention and response activities including supplementary immunization activities, capacity building for health workers, and targeted technical support. Enhanced disease surveillance and innovative tools like geospatial technologies are also being leveraged to address broader health priorities, including Mpx.

Also, to combat ongoing poliovirus transmission in Central and West Africa, Ministers of Health from the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel sub-region have outlined a cross-border coordination plan for 2025, strengthening joint efforts to halt transmission and prevent polio spread. Looking ahead, sustaining essential polio functions will be vital to preserving the gains made and ensuring continued success in maintaining a polio-free world. The year 2025 will be crucial for advancing the transition efforts, with a focus on resource mobilization and collaboration with broader health systems.

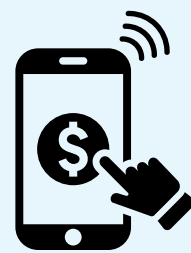
Our impact in the African Region



165 million children vaccinated in 2024 (as of end of October)



26 countries conducted vaccination rounds against polio (as of end of October)



2 million polio frontline workers paid with digital finance solutions in 22 African countries



11 WHO-trained labs expanded genomic sequencing, with 6 of them pilot-testing techniques



98% (46/47) of countries have established environmental surveillance systems



800+ health professionals trained in GIS, ODK, GTS, data analysis, and visualization in 2024

We support countries



Maintaining high quality surveillance to ensure polioviruses are detected on time. The region achieved a 6.7 Non polio Acute Flaccid Paralysis rate (full year) and a 89% stool adequacy rate in 2023, meeting targets for both key core surveillance indicators. Over 241,000 active surveillance visits were documented electronically with AFRO developed technologies in 2023.



Detecting 413 polioviruses in 23 countries in 2024 (as of October 31st, 2024). Circulating variant type 1, 2, and 3 cases were confirmed. 59% (28/47) of countries in the African Region reported polio cases in the past year.



Responding to polio outbreaks by implementing supplementary immunization activities (SIAs) in 26 African countries from January to end of October, 2024. In total, more than 165 million children were vaccinated with at least one dose of polio vaccine.



Enabling 98% (46/47) of countries in the African Region to have functional Environmental Surveillance Systems. All countries have been visited and 47 new environmental surveillance sites were set up in 2023, resulting in enhanced detection activities. More than 7,300 environmental isolates were collected from wastewater and tested in the past year.



Enhancing country capacities through the AFRO Geographic Information Systems Centre to map cross-border communities, migratory routes, border crossings and transit routes using key electronic data tools (eSURV, ODK). Over 800 health professionals were trained in GIS, ODK, GTS, data analysis, and visualization tools in the first half of 2024.



Reaching over 2 million frontline workers with timely payments in 22 African countries. WHO's Mobile Money digital payment system has been able to pay 95% of health workers within 10 days following the end of each vaccination campaign. In 2024, three additional countries are implementing this system: Benin, Guinea, and Mozambique. The system serves as a model for improved campaigns in resource-challenged settings.



Enhancing Africa's polio surveillance through a network of 16 laboratories that trace poliovirus origins from stool and wastewater. In 2024, WHO trained regional lab teams, health professionals and data managers in genetic sequencing, with six of 11 labs piloting advanced techniques like Sanger and MinION. Training in bioinformatics and data management was also provided to support informed public health decisions and timely outbreak responses.

Challenges

- Resource challenges lead to decreased supplementary immunization activities.
- The decline in routine immunization coverage and the interruption of preventive bOPV SIAs have left significant populations vulnerable to type 1 and type 3 poliovirus outbreaks.
- Conflict and insecurity disrupt services and complicate the difficult jobs of health workers.
- Health systems in Africa are strained by competing health priorities and emergencies, which negatively impact efforts to address health challenges, including polio, resulting in delayed vaccination campaigns and variable quality of those.
- Vaccination refusal continues due to misinformation and community fatigue, which was exacerbated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Way forward

- Strengthen cross border coordination, communication and collaboration.
- Improve population immunity focusing on reaching zero dose, under-immunized children in hard-to-reach and/or security-affected areas.
- Enhance and expand Acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and environmental surveillance for rapid detection.
- Strengthen laboratory sequencing capacity.
- Advance gender equality and the empowerment of women to eradicate polio.
- Intensify vaccination campaigns, leveraging technology and innovative solutions.

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