

COUNTRY PROFILE: INDIA

Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) Status: Non-endemic

Overview

- India has not had a case of wild poliovirus nor detected the virus in sewage sampling since 13 January 2011 and is considered to have interrupted transmission of indigenous wild poliovirus. The country has an aggressive plan to strengthen routine immunization and maintain supplementary activities in order to maintain high immunity. In addition, sensitive surveillance and emergency response plans are in place in every state to detect and swiftly respond to importations.
- As a measure of the scale and scope of India's achievement, when the Pulse Polio Immunisation Programme was launched in India in 1995, an estimated 150,000 polio cases were reported across the country each year.

Context

- The strong commitment of the Government of India ensures that the entire country is geared for the polio eradication programme down to the block and village level.
- Intensive, focused campaign efforts with tailored tools and strategies deliver the maximum possible protection to children in the hardest-to-reach areas and among the highest-risk populations.
- Millions of frontline, community-based mobilizers and vaccinators ensure that all children under five years old are immunized with oral polio vaccine (OPV) during each campaign round.
- A pervasive polio surveillance network can rapidly detect and respond to suspected polio cases.
- Social Mobilization Network (SMNet) workers spread awareness about polio and associated risk factors, including the need to protect children with free, life-saving vaccines through routine immunization; hygiene and sanitation; hand-washing; exclusive breast feeding up to six months; and diarrhea management with oral rehydration salts (ORS) and zinc.
- Robust communication strategies underscore the need for repeated immunization up to the age of five years; the incurable but preventable nature of polio, and the necessity for migrant, mobile and nomadic populations to immunize their children against polio.

Challenges

- Uphold polio eradication as a key health priority in India until global eradication.
- Ensure through very high levels of vigilance and emergency preparedness that any residual or imported poliovirus is rapidly detected and eliminated. The importation of wild poliovirus into China from Pakistan (as reported by the World Health Organization) in 2011 highlights the risk that India faces of polio returning to the country.
- Immunize all children up to five years of age, including those in mobile populations, with OPV at every available opportunity until global eradication is achieved.
- Confront the risk of complacency among the population and within the polio programme in view of zero cases.

Key Actions Needed

- Regularly review and update emergency response plans and maintain staff training.
- Continue extensive social mobilization and communications as well as national and large-scale subnational immunization days, to maintain population immunity, particularly in those areas at highest risk of importations.
- Track newborns to facilitate follow-up for routine immunization.
- Refine strategies to identify and reach mobile and migrant populations.

To learn more about the roles and responsibilities of UNICEF and other GPEI partners, visit:
<http://www.polioinfo.org/index.php/about-us/partners>