

**Press Information Bureau
Government of India
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**

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**Longest Polio Free Period Ever Seen in India
System Geared for Emergency Response to Eradicate Polio
World Polio Day to be observed on October 24 2011**

Only one polio case has been detected so far this year in the country making it the longest polio-free period ever since eradication efforts were launched. The only case of polio reported this year has been from Howrah district in West Bengal on 13th January 2011 as compared to 39 cases in the country in the same period of 2010. For the first time no case of polio has been reported from UP (since April 2010) and also from Bihar (since September 2010). No case of type 3 polio has come up for over a year. Closest ever to eradicating polio, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has decided to treat any fresh case of polio as a “public health emergency” in order to achieve polio eradication from India at the earliest. An Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan has been drawn up to intensify measures to build the immunity of children in all high risk areas and also to conduct intensive immunization campaigns rapidly in response to any polio cases if they occurred.

In context of World Polio Day, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad noted that while the progress this year is remarkable, the risk still persists. “We are close to our goal but are not taking any chances. Efforts will be further intensified in the country to stop any residual poliovirus circulation and also to prevent any polio cases following an international importation,” he observed. Shri Azad also noted that the remarkable progress follows introduction of bivalent Oral Polio vaccine besides persistent efforts over the last few years in the highest risk areas and in reaching the most vulnerable populations such as the newborns, the migrants and the mobile populations.

To mitigate the risk of polio importation from Pakistan which is experiencing a spurt in cases and has re-infected China, polio immunization has begun at the Wagah border and Attari train station in Punjab since September and Munabo in Barmer district of Rajasthan since this month. All children crossing over into India by road and train are being administered polio vaccine. An alert has been sounded in the states bordering China to step up polio surveillance. Continuous polio vaccination is also being carried out at 81 transit points along the Indo-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar since April this year, the Minister said.

A series of new initiatives have been taken this year.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has put in place an Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP). All states in India are preparing their EPRP. As a part of this plan, Rapid Response Team have already been constituted and (i) high-risk districts (ii) blocks (iii) villages are being identified to roll out measures to scale up routine immunization; address polio associated risk factors such as hygiene, hand washing and diarrhoea management with the use of

zinc and ORS. The plans are also identifying and putting resources in place to roll out of rapid and intense emergency response to any polio case.

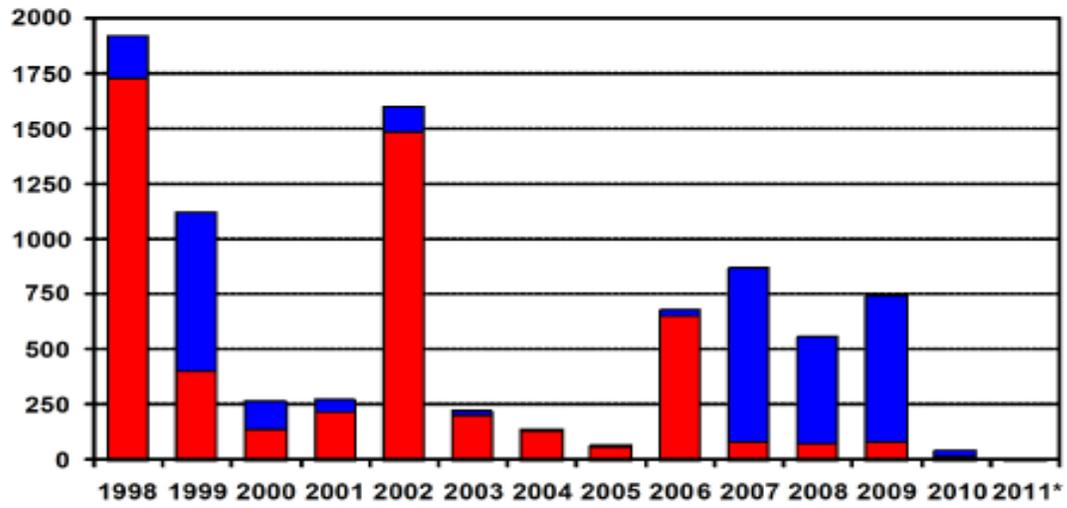
A new communication campaign personalizing the message for polio immunization from 'Har bachcha har bar' (every child every time) to 'mera bachcha har bar' (my child every time) has been rolled out. The new campaign encourages all parents to take action to protect their children against polio. These measures are in addition to the intense efforts already being made in the polio endemic states of UP and Bihar to ensure that the children living the highest risk areas and specially the youngest children, the newborns, are rapidly protected. A 107 Block Plan that addresses actions to improve actions to improve polio coverage and routine immunization in 107 high risk blocks of UP and Bihar in addition to tackling risk factors such as reducing incidence of diarrhea, improving sanitation and water quality is being implemented.

Special strategies are being implemented to protect children on the move – those of migrants, nomads, construction sites and brick kiln workers and the families returning to their homes in the endemic states on important festivals such as Holi, Diwali and Chatt. Mobile and transit vaccination teams immunize children at railway stations, inside running trains, at bus stands, market areas, brick kilns, construction sites etc. Around 5 million children are immunized by transit and mobile teams during every round in UP, Bihar and Mumbai alone. Polio immunization is also carried out at religious congregations such as the ongoing ArdhKumbh in Bihar, the annual ShravaniMela, Urs in Ajmer and elsewhere in UP and Bihar.

India's progress and efforts have been lauded by both national and international experts and bodies. The India Expert Advisory Group on Polio Eradication, which reviewed the programme in July mentioned that India is on track to eradicate polio. The International Monitoring Board (IMB) of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in its October report has said that India is on track to interrupt transmission in 2011. Lauding India's efforts, the IMB said India had pushed barriers after barriers to reach a very favorable position. India stands alone as the country that has demonstrably made consistent progress over a prolonged period of time.

It is pertinent to note that in 1985, there were estimated 2 lakh polio cases in the country in the wake of which polio vaccine was universalized and integrated in the Universal Immunization Programme for administration across the country. In 1995, when Pulse Polio Programme was launched, there were still an estimated 50,000 polio cases in the country. However 2010 was the turning point when only 42 polio cases were reported. Every year two National Immunisation Days (NIDs) are carried out in January and February. During each NID nearly 17.2 crore children are immunized. Nearly 23 lakh vaccinators under the direction of 155,000 supervisors visit 20 crore houses to administer oral polio vaccine to children under the age of 5 years. The polio campaigns during the rest of the year cover polio endemic states and other areas at risk of importation of poliovirus.

POLIO CASES OVER THE YEARS



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