

Stopping polio amid crisis

EPW core priorities and flagships

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Promoting health and well-being
The European Immunization Agenda 2030 🚩
Incorporating behavioural and cultural insights 🚩

WHO collaboration

Operational support
Country cooperation strategy

In October 2021 Ukraine faced a serious public health threat when a vaccine-derived poliovirus outbreak emerged. Threatening children's health nationwide, the outbreak was exacerbated by suboptimal immunization coverage and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Complicating the situation, the escalation of war in early 2022 led to the mass displacement of people, damage to health-care infrastructure and disruptions to the delivery of medical supplies.

Ukraine's Ministry of Health, with support from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, of which WHO is a partner, swiftly responded to the outbreak. The Regional Office provided technical and operational support, including guidance on enhanced poliovirus surveillance, the roll-out of a rapid immunization campaign, and strategic coordination with local health authorities. The Country Office coordinated community engagement and risk communication, which also played an important role in the response.

The impact

Ukraine successfully vaccinated nearly 140 000 children under 6 years of age who had missed their routine immunizations. Mobile vaccination teams were deployed, ensuring that even the most vulnerable and difficult-to-reach children were immunized. Despite the ongoing war, these efforts meant that no new polio cases were detected and risk of further transmission within and beyond Ukraine was prevented. The outbreak was officially declared closed in September 2023.

Lessons learned

- Close collaboration between health authorities and international organizations is crucial in crisis situations.
- Rapid outbreak responses, including targeted vaccination campaigns, can effectively control the spread of disease even in challenging environments.
- Sustaining sensitive surveillance systems for vaccine-preventable diseases, including the laboratory component, can help to ensure early detection of cases.

Donors and partners

Ministry of Health; Global Polio Eradication Initiative; USAID



A child receives a polio vaccine as part of the rapid outbreak response in Ukraine.
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“The Ministry of Health is committed to strengthening vaccine-preventable disease surveillance and working to achieve and sustain high routine immunization coverage.”

Dr Viktor Liashko, Minister of Health, Ukraine

What's next?

Ukraine aims to bolster its immunization infrastructure, maintain high polio vaccination coverage and further enhance its surveillance system to prevent future outbreaks. The Regional Office will continue to support these efforts, focusing on protecting the health of every child, even amid the challenges posed by ongoing conflict.