

Egypt to vaccinate after polio found in sewer (Update)

January 24 2013, by Mariam Rizk

Egypt will carry out a vaccination campaign for children in parts of Cairo after polio was recently found in the capital's sewage, believed to have been brought to the country from Pakistan, a Health Ministry official said Thursday.

The discovery underlined concerns over the possibility of a spread of polio from Pakistan, one of only three countries in the world where it has not been eradicated. A wild poliovirus was found in samples taken from sewage in the impoverished Cairo districts of Ezbet el-Haggana and Dar el-Salam and it was determined to be related to a strain present in Pakistan, the World Health Organization said.

Egypt was declared polio-free after its last case in May 2004, and the Health Ministry's head of preventative medicine Amr Qandil underlined that no new cases have been found in Egypt.

Qandil told The Associated Press that the ministry will start vaccinating children under 5 in those neighborhoods on Feb. 3. The campaign will be broadened around Cairo in the first week of March.

The virus might have been transmitted from a Pakistani coming to Cairo, or an Egyptian who visited Pakistan and came back with the disease, Qandil said. He added that children coming from countries known to suffer from the virus are vaccinated as they enter Egypt.

The WHO, the U.N. children's organization UNICEF and the Polio

Monitoring Cell in Pakistan called the discovery in Egypt "critical and alarming" for the polio eradication program in Pakistan. It said children under 5 departing Pakistan will be given polio drops at airports.

Nine people working on an anti-polio vaccination campaign were shot and killed in Pakistan last month. Islamist militants in Pakistan have opposed the vaccination campaign, claiming the health workers are spies and the vaccine would make children sterile. In response for the killings, immunizations were halted in some areas and the U.N. suspended its field participation everywhere for a period until better security for teams was put in place.

Besides Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria are the only countries where polio remains endemic.

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Citation: Egypt to vaccinate after polio found in sewer (Update) (2013, January 24) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-01-egypt-vaccinate-polio-sewer.html>

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