

UN confirms 10 polio cases in northeast Syria

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The U.N.'s health agency said Tuesday it has confirmed 10 polio cases in northeast Syria, the first confirmed outbreak of the diseases in the country in 14 years, with a risk of spreading across the region.

Officials are awaiting lab results on another 12 cases showing polio symptoms, said World Health Organization spokesman Oliver Rosenbauer.

Rosenbauer said the confirmed cases are among babies and toddlers, all under 2, who were "under-immunized."

The [polio virus](#), a highly contagious disease, usually infects [children](#) in unsanitary conditions through the consumption of food or liquid contaminated with feces. It attacks the nerves and can kill or paralyze, and can spread widely and unnoticed before it starts crippling children.

"This is a communicable disease—with population movements it can travel to other areas," said Rosenbauer. "So the risk is high of spread across the region."

Syria had launched a vaccination campaign around the country days after the Geneva-based WHO said it had received reports of children showing symptoms of [polio](#) in Syria's Deir el-Zour province, but the campaign faces difficulty with lack of access in many parts of the war-torn country.

Nearly all Syrian children were vaccinated against the disease before the

civil war began more than 2 ½ years ago. Polio was last reported in Syria in 1999.

The Syrian conflict, which began as a largely peaceful uprising against President Bashar Assad in March 2011, has triggered a humanitarian crisis on a massive scale, killing more than 100,000 people, driving nearly 7 million more from their homes and devastating cities and towns.

U.N. officials have warned of the spread of disease in Syria because of lack of access to basic hygiene and vaccinations.

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