

# Ukraine launches delayed polio vaccination drive

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Ukraine reported Tuesday the start of a polio vaccination drive that began only after health groups accused Kiev of being critically late in responding to Europe's first outbreak since 2010.

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed in late August that two Ukrainian [children](#) had been crippled by the virus in the crisis-torn nation's southwestern Zakarpattya region.

But international relief groups condemned the Ukrainian authorities in early October for having done nothing since then to prevent the dangerous situation from spiralling out of control.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reports that Ukrainian children have not been vaccinated against [polio](#) since 2008—a failure that could lead to outbreaks outside the EU-bordering former Soviet state.

Ukraine's [health](#) ministry said on Tuesday that the nationwide vaccination campaign had finally begun.

"Today, we began vaccinating children throughout Ukraine," health ministry spokeswoman Valentyna Misyats told AFP.

The Ukrainian government said 3.7 million oral polio vaccines had been procured for the cash-strapped country with the help of funding from Canada—a Kiev ally with one of the world's largest Ukrainian diasporas.

Ukraine has been short of cash and its politics riven by conflicts due to the financial and humanitarian costs of the 18-month-old pro-Russian separatist uprising in the east of the country.

"I congratulate the minister and the ministry of health for their leadership and for starting the vaccination campaign," the World Health Organisation's Ukraine representative Dorit Nitzan told AFP.

Polio can lead to irreversible paralysis and mostly affects children under the age of five.

The WHO recorded only 416 worldwide polio cases in 2013—down from the 350,000 registered in 1988.

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