

Pakistan demands Facebook remove polio vaccine misinformation

May 3 2019

Pakistan urged Facebook to remove harmful polio-related content from the social networking site on Friday, saying it was jeopardising eradication initiatives and putting the lives of vaccinators at risk.

Polio vaccination campaigns have faced stubborn resistance for years in Pakistan.

In recent months Pakistani social media has been inundated with fake news reports and videos—garnering thousands of views and shares in the last week alone—claiming numerous children have been killed by the [polio vaccine](#).

Thousands of parents have refused to allow their children to be inoculated.

"The parental refusals due to propaganda on Facebook regarding the [vaccine](#) is emerging as the major obstacle in achieving complete eradication of the virus," Babar Atta, who is helping oversee the country's [vaccination drive](#), said in a statement.

Atta has requested "Facebook's management to block and/or manage the dissemination of such anti vaccination propaganda from their platforms operating from within Pakistan".

At least three people were killed in the last country-wide anti-[polio](#) campaign in April.

The violence coincided with an outbreak of hysteria in cities across northwest Pakistan after rumours of children suffering from adverse reactions to a polio vaccine sparked panic, with tens of thousands rushed to hospitals.

Last week, around 10,000 vaccination refusals were reported per day in Islamabad, compared to 200 to 300 during the previous campaign, according to figures from the country's anti-polio programme.

Opposition to myriad forms of inoculation skyrocketed after the CIA organised a fake vaccination drive to help track down Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in the garrison town of Abbottabad, where US forces later killed the militant leader in 2011.

Some Taliban and hardline religious figures have been known to fan rumours that vaccines contain ingredients forbidden in Islam, such as pork derivatives, or that can cause infertility as part of a conspiracy to reduce the population.

Attacks by militants have also been frequent, with nearly 100 people killed in assaults targeting vaccine teams since 2012.

Despite the opposition, campaigners have reported progress with tens of millions of children vaccinated across the country along with a 96 percent drop in reported polio cases since 2014.

But as Pakistan nears its goal of ridding polio from its territory, new headwinds have arisen amid a growing global movement against inoculation.

In addition to Pakistan, Polio is endemic in two other countries globally—Afghanistan and Nigeria—although a relatively rare strain was also detected in Papua New Guinea last year.

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Citation: Pakistan demands Facebook remove polio vaccine misinformation (2019, May 3) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-pakistan-demands-facebook-polio-vaccine.html>

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