

UN says new polio outbreak in Sudan caused by oral vaccine

September 2 2020, by Maria Cheng



In this Wednesday, April 24, 2013 file photo, a Somali baby receives a polio vaccine at the Medina Maternal Child Health center in Mogadishu, Somalia. Health authorities on Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2020 are expected to declare the African continent free of the wild poliovirus after decades of effort, though cases of vaccine-derived polio are still sparking outbreaks of the paralyzing disease in more than a dozen countries. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File)

The World Health Organization says a new polio outbreak in Sudan is linked to an ongoing vaccine-sparked epidemic in Chad—a week after the U.N. health agency declared the African continent free of the wild polio virus.

It declared that the African continent was free of the wild polio virus, calling it "an incredible and emotional day."

On Monday, WHO warned that the risk of further spread of the vaccine-derived polio across central Africa and the Horn of Africa was "high," noting the large-scale population movements in the region.

More than a dozen African countries are currently battling outbreaks of polio caused by the virus, including Angola, Congo, Nigeria and Zambia.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, many of the large-scale vaccination campaigns needed to stamp out polio have been disrupted across Africa and elsewhere, leaving millions of children vulnerable to infection.

In April, WHO and its partners reluctantly recommended a temporary halt to mass polio immunization campaigns, recognizing the move could lead to a resurgence of the disease. In May, they reported that 46 campaigns to vaccinate children against polio had been suspended in 38 countries, mostly in Africa, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Some of the campaigns have recently been re-started, but health workers need to vaccinate more than 90% of children in their efforts to eradicate the paralytic disease.

Health officials had initially aimed to wipe out polio by 2000, a deadline repeatedly pushed back and missed. Wild polio remains endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan; both countries also are struggling to contain outbreaks of vaccine-derived polio.

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