

Lessons we can learn from polio vaccination campaigns

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A new study examining the impact of the global polio vaccine campaign has identified important lessons that "should be considered for COVID-19 vaccine roll-outs over coming years."

The systematic global review found polio immunization activities in low-

and middle-income countries stopped transmission of polio but missed opportunities that could strengthen health systems.

"Polio eradication initiatives have had a critical role in stopping the spread of polio virus by increasing coverage for polio vaccines along with other interventions like improving monitoring of disease," the study's lead investigator Dr. Meru Sheel, from The Australian National University, said.

"Around the globe we have been successful at increasing polio [vaccine](#) coverage, but these programs could have been utilized for delivery of non-polio vaccines and other health services. This is particularly important when the amount of disease in the community is low."

In 1988, the World Health Assembly resolved to eradicate polio globally by 2000 and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative was launched as one of the largest ever public health initiatives with a goal to immunize every child against polio and eradicate the disease.

Substantial progress has been made with the eradication of two of the three wild poliovirus serotypes—types 2 and 3. In 1994, the Americas region was the first to formally achieve polio elimination.

However, experts say the original global eradication targets in some parts of the world haven't been met.

Across the globe, supplementary immunization activities are conducted for polio. They include [mass vaccination campaigns](#) or national immunization days and involve the mass vaccination of all children in a specific age group, regardless of their previous immunization status.

The review, published in *BMJ Global Health*, analyzed more than 1,600 studies and found only 20 included data that assessed the impact of polio

campaigns on [health](#) systems.

It found the majority of studies in low- and [middle-income countries](#) had limitations on data collection.

"This study found important data to improve vaccine programs in response to outbreaks in low and middle income countries," Dr. Sheel said.

"One of the successes was strengthened community mobilization to increase up-take of the [polio](#) vaccine, but, we found it was a missed opportunity to improve immunization programs in some parts of the world.

"For example, long term retention of trained staff and monitoring of vaccine coverage data.

"Polio was eliminated from large parts of the world and is a very successful program. There are lessons from the program that can help improve COVID-19 responses."

More information: Amy Vassallo et al, Assessing the impact of polio supplementary immunisation activities on routine immunisation and health systems: a systematic review, *BMJ Global Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006568](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006568)

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