

Pakistan launches anti-polio drive as COVID-19 cases rise

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A health worker marks the finger of a child after receiving the polio vaccine in Lahore, Pakistan, Monday, Jan. 24, 2022. Pakistani authorities on Monday launched this year's first nationwide anti-polio campaign despite facing a sudden surge of coronavirus cases in an effort aimed eradicating the crippling children's disease. Credit: AP Photo/K.M. Chaudhry

Pakistani authorities on Monday launched this year's first nationwide anti-polio campaign even as coronavirus infections surge.

About 150,000 [health workers](#) are taking part in the five-day, anti-polio drive to inoculate 22.4 million children under age 5, according to a statement issued by Shahzad Beg, the coordinator for polio program. The previous campaign took place weeks ago when Pakistan witnessed decline in COVID-19 cases.

Authorities hope the latest campaign will help making Pakistan a polio-free nation.

Last year, Pakistan reported only one polio case from the country's southwestern Baluchistan province. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only countries in the world where polio remains endemic and the disease can cause partial paralysis in children.

Pakistan for 25 years has been carrying out regular inoculation campaigns in which health workers go door-to-door to give the polio drops to children. Most of the workers are women, as they can get better access to mothers and children.

Pakistani authorities have stepped up security for polio teams.

In recent years, Pakistani militants have targeted polio teams and police escorting them, claiming falsely that the anti-polio drive is part of a Western conspiracy to sterilize [children](#) or collect intelligence. These attacks increased after it was revealed that a fake hepatitis vaccination [campaign](#) was used as a ruse by the CIA in the hunt for al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was killed by U.S. commandos in 2011 in Pakistan.



A health worker administers a polio vaccine to a child at a railway station in Lahore, Pakistan, Monday, Jan. 24, 2022. Pakistani authorities on Monday launched this year's first nationwide anti-polio campaign despite facing a sudden surge of coronavirus cases in an effort aimed eradicating the crippling children's disease. Credit: AP Photo/K.M. Chaudhry



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Monday's latest anti-[polio](#) push comes amid a steady increase in cases of coronavirus.

In the past 24 hours, Pakistan registered more than 7,000 COVID-19 cases, one of the highest number of daily infections since June 2020.

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