

Polio outbreak risk increases in western Ukraine as war ensues

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The reintroduction of the wild-type poliovirus or circulating vaccine-

derived poliovirus (cVDPV) is a sizeable threat in the Ukraine, which is considered a high-risk country for vaccine-preventable infections, including poliomyelitis, an extremely dangerous disease that causes paralysis in children. The situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in eastern Ukraine, and ongoing healthcare reforms, scientists from Ukraine explained at the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology.

On October 6, 2021, a case of paralytic poliomyelitis was confirmed in a 1.5-year-old child from Western Ukraine with a [poliovirus](#) shedding genetically similar to an environmental sample from Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Since January 2022, 19 cases of paralytic polio have been confirmed in western Ukraine, leading to a declaration of a public health emergency in the Rivne and Zakarpattia provinces.

"The invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine on February 24, 2022 led to thousands of victims, occupied territories, millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. All this disrupted access to [medical care](#), significantly disrupted routine vaccinations and the response to the polio outbreak in Ukraine," the scientists wrote.

The high risk of spread is due to low immunization—73.3% as of December, 2021—as well as to gaps in immunization at the regional level, said presenting author Dmytro Stepanskyi, head of the Department of Microbiology, Virology, Immunology and Epidemiology, Dnipropetrovsk Medical Academy of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. These factors lead to high risks of international spread of the virus to polio-free countries.

The Ministry of Health of Ukraine has worked with international partners to develop a unified strategy to respond to the outbreak. These measures include strengthening surveillance nationally, immunization efforts for unvaccinated children under 6 years of age, as well as

advocacy and communications activities.

More information: Conference:
asm.org/Events/ASM-Microbe/Registration

Provided by American Society for Microbiology

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