

\$2.6 bn pledged in global push to wipe out polio but more needed

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A global five-year plan to eradicate polio received pledges of some \$2.6 billion on Tuesday, but nearly double the amount is needed to complete the task, the World Health Organization said.

While welcoming the generous pledges, the United Nations' health agency stressed there was still some way to go to eliminate the crippling and potentially fatal viral disease by 2026.

It pointed to an upsurge in cases detected this year, including in countries long considered to be free of the highly contagious and often paralysing virus, which mainly affects children under the age of five.

"The new detections of polio this year in previously polio-free countries are a stark reminder that if we do not deliver our goal of ending polio everywhere, it may resurge globally," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"We must remember the significant challenges we have overcome to get this far against polio, stay the course and finish the job once and for all."

In all, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI)—a public—private partnership that counts WHO among its main partners—says it needs \$4.8 billion for its 2022-2026 strategy to overcome the final hurdles to eliminating the disease.

During the World Health Summit in Berlin—the first major opportunity to pledge support—countries and organisations confirmed they would cover a significant chunk of the funding needs.

Nearly half the amount came from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has said it will pitch in \$1.2 billion.

Rotary International has pledged \$150 million, the United States \$114 million and Germany \$72 million.

"No place is safe until polio has been eradicated everywhere," said German Economic Cooperation and Development Minister Svenja

Schulze.

"As long as the virus still exists somewhere in the world, it can spread."

A massive global effort has in recent decades come close to wiping out polio.

Cases have decreased by 99 percent since 1988, when the disease was endemic in 125 countries and 350,000 cases were recorded worldwide.

The wild version of the [virus](#) now exists only in Afghanistan and Pakistan, though Malawi and Mozambique also detected imported wild polio cases in 2022.

And a type of vaccine that contains small amounts of weakened but live polio still causes occasional outbreaks elsewhere, as it has recently in the United States and Britain.

Oral [polio](#) vaccine replicates in the gut and can be passed to others through faecal-contaminated water—meaning it will not hurt the child who has been vaccinated but could infect their neighbours in places where immunisation levels are low.

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