

33 million kids vaccinated against polio in southern Africa

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More than 33 million children in several southern African countries have been vaccinated against polio, part of ongoing efforts to eradicate the infectious paralytic disease that has been largely contained in much of

the world, the World Health Organization announced on Friday.

About 80 million drops of the inoculation have been placed in the mouths of [children](#) across Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe since the launch of an emergency response in March last year, WHO said in a statement.

Malawi detected the wild poliovirus disease in a [young child](#) in its capital, Lilongwe, in February last year—the first time the strain was reported in Africa in five years. The virus spread to neighboring Mozambique, causing other countries in the region to be on alert.

Africa was certified as free of indigenous wild polio in 2020, according to WHO, which says the recent strain originated from Pakistan. The South Asian country and its neighbor, Afghanistan, are the only two countries where the virus is still entrenched.

In the [latest outbreak](#), Malawi has reported one case while Mozambique has recorded eight. Mozambique recorded the last confirmed case in August 2022, said WHO.

Although polio has been spreading in numerous African countries in recent years, those outbreaks were linked to viruses originally contained in vaccines, not to the wild virus. In very rare instances, the live virus in the oral polio vaccine can mutate into a version capable of causing epidemics, particularly in populations that haven't been immunized.

Polio spreads mostly from person to person or through contaminated water. It attacks the [nervous system](#) and can sometimes paralyze people within hours. The disease mostly affects children under five.

Vaccinations will continue in southern Africa "so that every child receives the protection they need," WHO's Africa director Matshidiso

Moeti said.

At least five vaccination rounds are planned for this year following 19 that took place last year, she said, adding that the region has "made huge efforts" to strengthen polio detection and control the spread of the virus.

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