Polio case confirmed in Enga, Papua New Guinea

Department of Health and WHO conducting joint field investigation following confirmation of case in another province

**6 August 2018, PORT MORESBY** – The National Department of Health of Papua New Guinea (NDOH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) today announced a case of polio in a 3-year old boy from Mulitaka, Laigam District in Enga Province. The case is the third in the country, following confirmation of two cases from Lae, Morobe Province in June and July 2018.

The confirmation was made on Friday 3 August 2018 by the Victorian Infectious Disease Reference Laboratory—a WHO Collaborating Centre in Australia. The boy had an onset of symptoms on 30 June and onset of paralysis on 2 July. His vaccination history is unknown due to unavailability of the baby clinic book, and his travel history is being established.

Results from the global polio laboratory at the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed that the new case is genetically linked to the other two cases from Morobe Province.

“The detection of the case is a result of our enhanced surveillance system put in place in all provinces in response to the confirmed polio cases in Morobe province,” according to Pascoe Kase, Secretary of the National Department of Health. “A joint NDOH and WHO team is currently in the field to conduct an epidemiological investigation. Confirmation of this case in Enga highlights that the outbreak has spread geographically, and this is a concern. It is critical that all children are rapidly vaccinated as part of the ongoing outbreak response in the country, to stop the spread of this virus and prevent further children from being paralysed.”

“The identification of this case underscores the importance of maintaining high levels of routine vaccination coverage and effective surveillance systems for early detection”, said Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative in Papua New Guinea. “The virus can emerge in populations which are inadequately immunized. In many provinces, including Enga, the vaccination coverage is far below the required level.”

Given substantial vaccination coverage gaps across the country, the risk of further spread of polio within the country continues to be classified as high, particularly with confirmation of spread of the virus to Enga.
“Any province with low routine immunization coverage or gaps in vaccination coverage during the outbreak response is vulnerable for polio virus circulation. This is highlighted by the new confirmed case in Enga,” said David Mcloughlin, UNICEF Representative in Papua New Guinea.

The National Polio Response Emergency Operations Center is currently updating its risk assessment and planning the enhancement of response operations, including possible expansion of vaccination to the entire Highlands Region.

More than 600,000 doses of oral polio vaccine have already been distributed in Papua New Guinea for supplemental immunization activities. Additional supplies for the remainder of the response are expected to arrive in country in the coming days.

Media Contacts

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