Polio Outbreak Response in Papua New Guinea
Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
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Papua New Guinea to vaccinate 700,000 in second round of polio campaign
Campaign in August targets children under 5 years of age in nine provinces

23 August 2018, Port Moresby – An estimated 700,110 children under 5 years old will be vaccinated against polio in nine provinces of Papua New Guinea in August 2018. The National Department of Health (NDOH) is mobilizing 4,964 polio workers who will be deployed to 49 districts.

In the six provinces of Enga, Chimbu, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, Jiwaka and Hela, the polio vaccination campaign is scheduled from 27 August to 9 September 2018. An official campaign launch for the Highlands will be led by Sir Dr Puka Temu, Minister for Health & HIV/AIDS on 27 August 2018 in Enga Province.

Morobe, Madang and Eastern Highlands provinces launched the campaign in July. A second polio vaccination round started in the three provinces on 20 August and will continue until 2 September 2018.

Mass polio vaccination campaigns are being implemented in Papua New Guinea following confirmation on 22 June that poliovirus is circulating in the country after 18 years polio-free. To date, four cases have been confirmed; two from Morobe, one from Enga and one from Eastern Highlands Province.

“Polio threatens the children of Papua New Guinea”, said Sir Dr Puka Temu, Minister for Health & HIV/AIDS of Papua New Guinea. “Polio causes paralysis and even death. There is no cure for polio, and the only option we have as parents is to prevent it through vaccination. As a nation, let us work together to ensure that the children of Papua New Guinea are protected from polio.”

A nationwide polio vaccination campaign is planned for September and October targeting 1,265,000 children under 5 years old.

“Papua New Guinea has received tremendous support from development partners and the international community in fighting the polio outbreak”, said Pasco Kase, Secretary of the Department of Health of Papua New Guinea. “Let us do our share in stopping this outbreak by bringing our children for vaccination. Together, we can ensure that no further children are paralysed by polio.”
“The World Health Organization remains committed to fighting this polio outbreak alongside the Government of Papua New Guinea and other partners”, said Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative in Papua New Guinea. “This fight will be challenging, but if we work together, we are optimistic we can be polio-free again.

WHO has deployed more than 20 international experts to support the Government in the response and additional personnel are on their way to the country to support the campaign.

Since the start of the outbreak, WHO has supported the National Department of Health in establishing 10 emergency operations centres (EOC) to serve as operational hubs for the management of day-to-day response operations. The National EOC based in Port Moresby was activated within 24 hours after the national health emergency was declared by the Government. Provincial EOCs were established in Morobe, Madang and Eastern Highlands while new EOCs are being set up in Enga, Chimbu, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, Jiwaka and Hela.

“We commend government and partners’ efforts of a successful first round of polio campaign in three provinces’, said UNICEF Representative, Mr David McLoughlin. “We reiterate our commitment to continue to support the government and partners’ fight against polio until PNG is polio-free”.

UNICEF procured and delivered one million doses of oral polio vaccines in early August for use in the second round of polio campaign. To ensure proper storage and handling of vaccines to remain effective, UNICEF also provided technical support to repair faulty vaccine refrigerators in the provinces and installed new refrigerators.

The polio vaccination campaign in Papua New Guinea is organized by the NDOH and the Provincial Health Authorities, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Rotary International and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The GPEI is spearheaded by national governments, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

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