

Polio is rising in Pakistan ahead of a new vaccination campaign



A police officer stands guard as a health worker (right) administers a polio vaccine to a child in a neighbourhood of Peshawar, Pakistan, Sept. 9, 2024 (AP Photo/Muhammad Sajjad)

Polio cases are rising ahead of a new vaccination campaign in Pakistan, where violence targeting health workers and the police protecting them has hampered years of efforts toward making the country polio-free.

Since January, health officials have confirmed 39 new polio cases in Pakistan, compared to only six last year, said Anwarul Haq of the National Emergency Operation Center for Polio Eradication.

The new nationwide drive starts Oct. 28 with the aim to vaccinate at least 32 million children. “The whole purpose of these campaigns is to achieve the target of making Pakistan a polio-free state,” he said.

Pakistan regularly launches campaigns against polio despite attacks on the workers and police assigned to the inoculation drives. Militants falsely claim the vaccination campaigns are a Western conspiracy to sterilize children.

Most of the new polio cases were reported in the southwestern Balochistan and southern Sindh province, following by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and eastern Punjab province.

The locations are worrying authorities since previous cases were from the restive northwest bordering Afghanistan, where the Taliban government in September suddenly stopped a door-to-door vaccination campaign.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the two countries in which the spread of the [potentially fatal, paralyzing disease](#) has never been stopped. Authorities in Pakistan have said that the Taliban's decision will have major repercussions beyond the Afghan border, as people from both sides frequently travel to each other's country.

The World Health Organization has confirmed 18 polio cases in Afghanistan this year, all but two in the south of the country. That's up from six cases in 2023. Afghanistan used a house-to-house vaccination strategy this June for the first time in five years, a tactic that helped to reach the majority of children targeted, according to WHO.

Health officials in Pakistan say they want the both sides to conduct anti-polio drives simultaneously.- **AP, Islamabad, October 21, 2024**