

# MEDIA FACT-FILE

POLIO ERADICATION

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## Focusing polio eradication efforts in West Bengal

**INTENSIVE** and concerted efforts to eradicate polio are on in West Bengal following confirmation of the disease in an 18-month old girl in Howrah district on 13 January 2011. This is the only polio case in India in 2011.

The persistence of polio in West Bengal risks spread to other parts of the country through the large migratory populations and threatens the unprecedented progress made in 2010, especially in the polio endemic states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. India is closest to polio eradication in its history, with lowest ever 42 cases in 2010, a 95 per cent reduction from 741 polio cases in 2009.

To stop polio in West Bengal an emergency response plan has been rolled out, led by the State Government with support of partner agencies UNICEF, WHO and Rotary. Thirty-six blocks in nine districts have been identified as high-risk for polio. Additional human and financial resources are being

deployed in these blocks to spread awareness about the need for polio immunization and improve the quality of the polio rounds. These blocks are in Kolkata, Howrah, Bardhaman, Birbhum, 24 North Parganas, 24 South Parganas, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah districts.

UNICEF has more than doubled the number of NGO volunteer community mobilizers to 1800 to work closely with the families to create awareness about polio immunization and remove misconceptions, if any, about the programme and vaccine safety. Rotary International is organising health camps in the high-risk areas. WHO has scaled up the number of surveillance medical officers to 40 to support planning and intense monitoring of the immunization rounds to ensure maximum possible coverage.

Multiple polio vaccination rounds are being held to rapidly boost immunity of children against polio and



Protecting children on the move: a child receives OPV at Howrah Station.

interrupt poliovirus transmission. To mitigate the risk of spread of poliovirus to polio-free states and most importantly to the traditional endemic Uttar Pradesh

and Bihar, polio immunization was carried out at the Howrah train station during the Holi festival rush of travellers. Howrah station handles over a million passengers every day.

## Father turns polio advocate

**ABDUL** Shah, father of the 18-month-old polio afflicted child in Howrah, dons a polio vaccinator's jacket and cap. He is in the forefront advocating for polio eradication at community meetings in Howrah, Kolkata and 24 South Parganas. "Please don't ignore polio immunization, make sure your child gets two drops of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) in every round. I never immunized any of my three children. As a result my daughter has polio", Shah tells parents at the polio advocacy meetings.

"I now feel helpless. Polio is irreversible. I know my child will not be able to walk like other children. This should not happen to anyone else," he says.

## Imams lend a helping hand

**THE** Imams of prominent mosques of West Bengal have joined the polio eradication campaign in the state. Maulana Mohammad Shafiq of Nakhoda Masjid, the biggest mosque in West Bengal, appealed to a crowd of nearly 17,000 people at the Friday prayers ahead of the 27 March round to ensure all children up to 5 years of age get polio drops.



Maulana Mohd Shafiq administering polio drops at a booth in Kolkata.

"Polio is a dreadful disease and once it catches someone that person never gets cured...I assure you that there is no ill effect of polio drops. I urge all to take polio drops fearlessly. I request you to support pulse polio workers when they come in your community for vaccination. I especially request my responsible people of the community to come forward and lend their helping hand to eradicate this disease once and for all from India and the world," he said.

On 27 March, the Imam inaugurated booths in Kolkata and 24 South Parganas and administered OPV to children. "I am happy to play my role and hope it has a positive impact," he said.

### Next Polio Round

- 22 May - Delhi & parts of U.P., Bihar & Maharashtra; migrants in Gujarat & Punjab
- 29 May - Parts of West Bengal & Jharkhand

### POLIO CASE UPDATE

As of 13 May 2011

	P1	P3	TOTAL
West Bengal	1	-	1
<b>Total India</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>

India has made unprecedented progress against polio. In 2011, to date, there is one case of polio in the country as compared to 20 polio cases in the corresponding period of 2010. The traditional polio reservoir states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are free of polio so far in 2011. Uttar Pradesh reported its last type 1 polio case in November 2009 and type 3 polio case in April 2010. Bihar reported its last type 1 polio case in September 2010 and type 3 polio case in January 2010. In 2010, India reported 42 polio cases against 741 in 2009.

For latest updates visit <http://www.npsuindia.org>

## Did You Know?

Uttar Pradesh, long considered the global epicentre of wild poliovirus, has not had any cases of poliovirus for more than a year. The last polio case confirmed from UP was on 21 April, 2010. It is essential that all children in UP continue to take OPV every time it is offered until age 5 to maintain high levels of immunity against wild poliovirus and guard against any outbreaks.

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