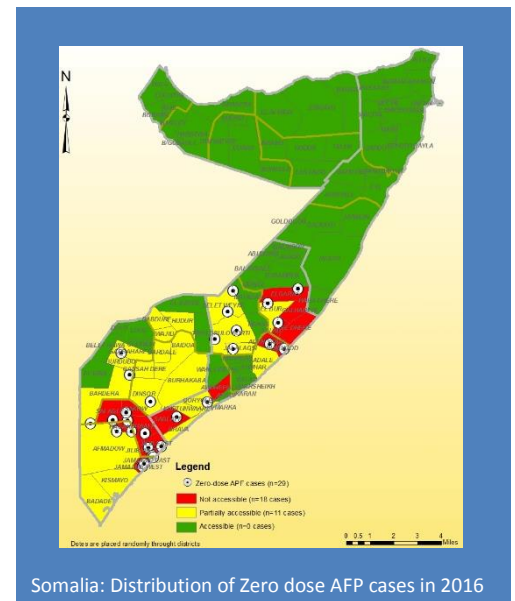


Dear Colleagues,

With fewer polio cases in 2016 to date than any previous year, we have an unprecedented opportunity to stop transmission of polio globally. To maintain the gains, we must systemically review surveillance activities not only in polio-endemic countries but also in all high-risk countries, and we must fix any weaknesses found. Knowing that we have crossed the finish line will only be possible with a robust and highly sensitive disease monitoring system.

It is a sobering fact that polio was spreading, unrecognized, for approximately five years in Nigeria. Other high-risk countries such as Libya, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan have limited health systems and long-term armed conflicts that can result in insufficient and unreliable disease detection. Programs in high-risk countries must ensure accurate and sensitive polio surveillance as well as extensive investigation of every single child with paralysis. The ongoing outbreak in the Lake Chad region is a stark reminder of what can happen if any surveillance gaps exist.



An example of ongoing efforts being taken to strengthen surveillance is the Brazzaville Initiative in Africa. This initiative has identified surveillance gaps in eight high-risk countries and has provided experienced consultants with catalytic resources to improve environmental and acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance as well as analysis of the quality of supplementary immunization activities in identified poorly performing subnational regions. The resulting strategies are then incorporated into standard surveillance efforts in each participating country to create lasting improvements in case detection and response. Another example includes the work completed by the Eastern Mediterranean region of the World Health Organization to review AFP data in high-risk countries in the region, determining potential gaps in case detection. Work is underway to expand community-based surveillance in Yemen and Somalia and maintain or establish high-quality surveillance in conflict areas. These strategies will be applied to other vulnerable areas to improve surveillance, case detection, and immunization in all polio-endemic and high-risk countries.

Polio surveillance is one of the most accurate public health monitoring systems for any disease, but Nigeria's experience shows that the system has to cover every community. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative has established a task team to focus on further innovating and improving polio virus detection worldwide. As we enter the low-transmission season for wild poliovirus, countries must continue to maintain the highest level of focus on surveillance.

As always, thank you for what you do to protect the world's most vulnerable children.

Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
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