



Dear Polio Eradication Supporter,

For your reference and information, below please find a special edition of Polio News, which provides an overview of various programmatic aspects currently affecting the GPEI, including:

- the latest on nOPV2 development and roll-out plans;
- proceedings at the upcoming World Health Assembly, in the context of COVID-19;
- planning around wild poliovirus eradication certification for the WHO African Region; and,
- impact of COVID-19 on GPEI operations.

We hope you find this update useful and relevant, and we encourage you to share it with your respective public- and private-sector counterparts as you deem appropriate. We will also make this special edition available on our global GPEI website, at [www.polioeradication.org](http://www.polioeradication.org)

### **Novel Oral Polio Vaccine Type 2 (nOPV2) Development**

The polio programme is continuing to move forward plans for deployment of the [novel oral polio vaccine type 2 \(nOPV2\)](#) as an additional tool to help address outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2). This year, the programme has marked several key milestones for the vaccine's development, and potential deployment as early as mid-2020:

- In January, WHO Member States of the Executive Board endorsed [a decision](#) that called on all countries to expedite the approval for use and import of nOPV2, as a key component in the [cVDPV2 outbreak response strategy](#).
- At the end of February, data from clinical trials and manufacturing processes for nOPV2 was submitted to WHO's Regulation and Prequalification (RPQ) department for review, to seek a WHO recommendation for use of nOPV2 under [WHO's Emergency Use Listing procedure \(EUL\)](#). BioFarma, the manufacturer of the vaccine, and the GPEI's nOPV2 Working Group are currently working to respond to the initial interim assessment report from the WHO PQ Vaccines team.
- In April, the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) endorsed the initial use criteria for nOPV2, pending the issuance of the interim EUL recommendation for use. This framework considers several epidemiological and logistical factors to ensure vaccine supply,

isolated use of nOPV2, and robust disease surveillance. The interim SAGE meeting report can be found [here](#).

The full impact of COVID-19 on nOPV2 roll-out remains to be seen. nOPV2 remains a top priority for the programme, and preparations are continuing to ensure nOPV2 doses are available for use as soon as possible following an interim EUL recommendation for use. Work remains on track to have 200 million doses available by the end of 2020. This will ensure that nOPV2 can be deployed immediately once the relevant regulatory approvals are obtained, and countries' national COVID-19 situations stabilize, which could be as early as mid-2020.

nOPV2 is a rapidly evolving project and the GPEI will continue to send updates via Polio News and directly in the coming months. There will also be opportunities to learn more about nOPV2 via webinars held in the coming months. More information on nOPV2 – including on the EUL process – can be found at <http://polioeradication.org/nopv2/>. Please check back frequently as new resources will be added as they are developed.

### **World Health Assembly (WHA)**

The WHA (18-19 May) will take place over video conference. Specific arrangements will be shared in due course by the WHO secretariat. It is proposed that these meetings focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and items that are essential for governance business continuity. Technical items would be considered later in the year, including through resumed sessions of the governing bodies. Abridged provisional agendas outlining these proposals will be posted on the [WHO governing bodies website](#). Technical reports will also be posted shortly on this website, including the GPEI report on polio eradication. The report will give an overview of the epidemiological situation and will highlight the Executive Board decision [EB146\(11\)](#), adopted at its 146th session, on the Strategy for Control of cVDPV2 2020–2021, including the roll-out of nOPV2 under Emergency Use Listing (EUL).

### **Certification of Wild Polio Eradication in the WHO African Region**

The WHO African Region has not witnessed any wild poliovirus transmission for more than three years, with the last case detected in Nigeria in August 2016. An independent group of experts, charged with reviewing and verifying the data on the situation and making an official determination, is expected to certify the region to have eradicated wild polio in 2020. The Africa Regional Certification Commission (ARCC) has already conducted all of its field verification visits and accepted the documentation of 43 of the 47 countries in the region, granting them a wild polio-free status. However, given the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions now in place across the region, the ARCC has been unable to conduct a final review of the remaining four countries' documentation ahead of making its final decision.

Across the continent, the GPEI has placed a high priority on maintaining disease surveillance activities, which do not pose the same risk of COVID-19 transmission as house-to-house vaccination campaigns. We look forward to the ARCC's final decision once the situation permits and remain hopeful that the WHO African Region will become the fifth region to be declared free of wild polio.

## GPEI and COVID-19

Our deepest sympathies are with families of COVID-19 patients.

The pandemic is continuing to affect the global polio eradication effort. Given that operationally polio vaccination campaigns are close-contact activities, they are incompatible with the current global guidance on physical distancing in regards to the COVID-19 response efforts. As such, the programme has taken a very difficult decision to temporarily delay immunization campaigns. The overriding priority is to ensure the health and safety of health workers as well as communities. All GPEI recommendations are in line with those on essential immunization and are available [here](#).

The GPEI Strategy Committee has established a Continuity Planning and Facilitation Group for the COVID-19 context, to work on a clear pathway towards resumption of paused vaccination efforts and all aspects of polio eradication efforts. The planning will encompass a wide range of work streams, be well-synchronized with other immunization and public health programmes, and allow flexibility to accommodate differences in country situations as the epidemiology of polio, other vaccine-preventable diseases and COVID-19 evolve. This short-term planning process may also ultimately identify revisions which may be required in the Polio Endgame Strategy 2019-23 to adapt to the post-pandemic phase.

In many countries, polio assets (e.g., personnel, logistics, operations) are assisting national health systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure the crisis is dealt with as rapidly and effectively as possible. Some of these experiences are chronicled in our [news stories](#).

## GPEI Governance Review

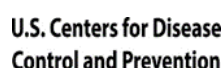
Following a series of consultations with stakeholders, a concrete set of recommendations has been presented to the GPEI's Strategy Committee, covering process improvements, structural changes and governance. The final report is expected in May, after which the Strategy Committee will report back to stakeholders.



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