

Holding Statement on IMB Report – September 22, 2025

Pakistan's Polio Programme will prioritize the Independent Monitoring Board recommendations to end the global health threat of polio

Polio teams remain committed to strengthening operations and run the last mile to eradicate the virus, preserving the 99.6% case reduction achieved over three decades

The Pakistan Polio Eradication Programme welcomes the report of the 24th meeting of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative held in July in Geneva.

The Programme is grateful for the consistent and valuable feedback received from the IMB, and will prioritize its recommendations to continue improving our operations and preserve the progress made over three decades in reducing polio cases by 99.6% – from an estimated 20,000 annual cases in 1994 to 74 cases in 2024, and 26 cases so far this year.

In order to run the last and most difficult mile to protect every child from polio, in Pakistan and across the world, the Pakistan Polio Programme appreciates and follows the recommendations from distinguished science-based forums like the IMB, the Polio Oversight Board (POB) and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

The IMB report acknowledges Pakistan's renewed commitment to polio eradication with a whole-of-government approach, starting with direct engagement from the Prime Minister and spanning down to the provincial and district administrations. **The Government of Pakistan has demonstrated strong ownership and leadership, with the Prime Minister personally chairing stock-take sessions, provincial authorities leading daily campaign reviews, and district commissioners ensuring frontline delivery. This collective leadership reflects confidence in the Government's ability to deliver on the goal of a polio-free future for Pakistan and the world.**

The report also recognizes the Programme's extensive efforts to interrupt the transmission of wild poliovirus and fill immunity gaps through six large-scale campaigns between September 2024 and July 2025, enhanced cross-border coordination through four synchronized campaigns with Afghanistan, systematic improvements in campaign quality, and efforts to reduce the number of children missed in security-compromised areas.

The IMB experts also highlight the Programme's efforts to digitize data of zero-dose children and engage community influencers to conduct campaigns in previously inaccessible areas of southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), as well as the decline of positive environmental samples in Quetta block and other parts of Punjab and Balochistan.

However, the IMB report also recommends the Programme to intensify efforts to address challenges like significant virus transmission in Karachi and Lahore, central Pakistan and southern KP. It also highlights critical challenges, including indigenous circulation in Lahore, population movement patterns in Karachi that hamper complete coverage, low immunization rates in Balochistan, and virus circulation with cross-border movement. Moreover, the report raises concerns about the increased risk of potential spread of poliovirus due to the ongoing flood situation in the country.

The Polio Programme is analyzing the IMB recommendations and is committed to integrating them into its strategic plans **through innovative use of technology, advanced analytics, and risk modelling to strengthen evidence-driven decisions and ensure data-informed responses.** These tools are helping to track population movement more precisely, identify hidden immunity gaps, and anticipate risks early, ensuring a faster and more data-driven response.

The polio teams continue to implement innovative strategies to reach all missed children in high-risk areas through **Integrated Service Delivery (ISD).** These initiatives combine vaccination with access to nutrition, primary health care, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions, offering immediate benefits to families while reducing barriers to vaccination. Importantly, ISD also brings in broader operational-level participation from health, education, and local government stakeholders, making campaigns more inclusive and responsive to community needs.

In areas with security challenges, the Programme is carrying out a community-led vaccination initiative, leveraging the trust of local influencers to lead the campaign in their areas. This initiative has contributed to reach 83% of the missed children in previously inaccessible areas of southern KP. In addition, outreach and community discussions are being conducted to address community hesitancy. Federal Health Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal is personally conducting outreach in areas affected by refusals.

Acknowledging the challenge of low Routine Immunization (RI) coverage, especially in Balochistan and parts of KP, the Programme is expanding synergy with the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to boost RI rates and close immunity gaps. These actions will help sustain progress against polio and contribute to stronger health systems.

Looking ahead, the National Task Force has endorsed a detailed roadmap to zero polio by the end of the upcoming low transmission season. This roadmap prioritizes targeted campaigns in persistent reservoirs, deeper integration with RI and ISD, and innovative operational models to address access and acceptance challenges. Achieving zero will require collective responsibility from all levels, government, partners, communities, and frontline workers, to translate these plans into results.

The Pakistan Polio Programme remains fully committed to continue its collaboration with the IMB and partners to eradicate the global and regional public threat of polio and offer a healthier and polio-free future for our children and grandchildren.
