

## Polio outbreak in the Middle East: Update

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Polio outbreak response in the Middle East is continuing to urgently stop an outbreak affecting the region. As of 20 March 2014, in the Syrian Arab Republic some cases have been reported: The most recent case had onset of paralysis on 17 December 2013. Further evidence of regional spread was confirmed lately by notification of a WPV1 case from Iraq, the first polio case in the country since 2000. A six-month old boy from Baghdad who had not been immunized, developed paralysis on 10 February 2014. Genetic sequencing indicates the virus is most closely related to virus detected in the Syrian Arab Republic. Prospects for rapidly controlling this event are positive, as Iraq has been part of a regional Middle East emergency outbreak response since confirmation of polio in the Syrian Arab Republic was received in October 2013. In response, all countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, in a joint resolution, declared polio eradication to be an emergency, calling for support in negotiating and establishing access to those children who are currently unreached with polio vaccination. In Iraq, since October, two nationwide immunization campaigns and three subnational campaigns have been conducted, achieving overall high quality. Approximately 95% of children were reported to have been reached during each campaign, though coverage has varied by area. In Lebanon, the Lebanese Ministry of Health launched an urgent national immunization drive to stop the disease regaining a foothold in Lebanon after an absence of 13 years. In addition to that, efforts have been ongoing to strengthen subnational surveillance sensitivity to ascertain the full extent of transmission, and since October 2013, 24 supplementary immunization activities (SIAs) have been conducted across the region to reach more than 22 million children with multiple doses, in:

- Egypt (2 nationwide SIAs; 1 subnational SIA);
- Iraq (2 nationwide SIAs; 3 subnational SIAs);
- Jordan (3 nationwide SIAs);
- Lebanon (3 nationwide SIAs);
- Syria (5 nationwide SIAs);
- Turkey (3 subnational SIAs); and
- West Bank and Gaza Strip (2 SIAs).

Phase 2 was launched on 1 April 2014, with nationwide campaigns in all previously mentioned countries.

### Biography

Randa Hamadeh is the Head of the Primary Health Care Department, and the Manager of Immunization and Essential Drugs Program at the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. She contributed to creating a PHC network in Lebanon through which preventive programs and community health initiatives could be initiated, usually involving local municipalities and NGOs. She has contributed to the introduction of the PHC facility accreditation program in Lebanon in 2008, and is the vice chair of the national accreditation committee. She has actively participated in the foundation of various NGOs. She is the author of many public health papers and booklets. She holds an MPH degree and a Vaccinology Diploma and is currently a senior Lecturer in the faculty of Health Sciences at the Antonine University in Lebanon.

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