

Editorial

Eradicating Polio - Our National Duty

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Polio currently remains endemic in only three countries - Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan.

The Polio virus has struck again with vengeance, as confirmed by the sources at The National Institute of Health, Pakistan. The national polio count so far this year has risen to 291 cases.

The visibly rattled Pakistani authorities should take a little heart from the fact that in 1952, over 58,000 Americans-including former US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the country's Supreme Court Justice William Douglas - were suffering from this disease, research reveals.

Of the nearly 58,000 cases of this epidemic reported in the United States of America in 1952, 3,145 people infected with the disease died and 21,269 were left with mild to disabling paralysis. This was the time when the peak age of incidence of Polio in the United States shifted from infants to children aged five to nine years, when the risk of paralysis is greater; and about one-third of the cases were reported in Americans over the age of 15 years.

These three nations should also bear in mind that in 1916, not less than 27,363 Polio cases were reported in 20 American states.

New York alone had 9,023 cases, of which 2,448 (28 per cent) resulted in death, and a larger number in paralysis.

This number rested at 37,476 in 1954. In 1977, there were 254,000 people living in the United States who had been paralysed by polio.

Moreover, some 40,000 polio survivors with varying degrees of paralysis still live in Germany, 30,000 in Japan, 24,000 in France, 16,000 in Australia, 12,000 in Canada and 12,000 in the United Kingdom.

Polio epidemics began to appear in Europe and the United States around 1900, spreading all over Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand during the first half of the 20th century.

In 1960, Czechoslovakia became the first country in the world to scientifically demonstrate nationwide eradication of polio.

According to WHO, Europe was declared polio-free only on June 21, 2002!

It was on March 24, 2014 that the WHO announced the eradication of Poliomyelitis in 11 countries of the South-East Asia region. These countries included Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Myanmar, Maldives, North Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste.

The last case of wild Polio in the South-East Asia Region was reported in India on 13 January 2011.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, financed by a wide range of public and private donors, has estimated that the financial requirements for the eradication of Polio from the world would be approximately US\$ 5.5 billion for the 2013-18.

Polio was first recognized by a German Orthopaedist Jakob Heine (1800-1879), who had authored the first medical report on the disease. Austrian biologist Karl Landsteiner (1868-1943) first discovered the Polio Virus in 1909, making him eligible for the 1930 Nobel Prize in Physiology. Jonas Edward Salk (1914-1995) developed the first successful inactivated Polio vaccine in the 1950s.

On July 2, 1952, assisted by the staff at New York's D.T. Watson Home for Crippled Children, Jonas Salk had injected 43 children with his killed-virus vaccine.

The Jonas Salk vaccine was first introduced in 1957 and an immediate vaccination rush commenced with this medicine in countries including Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, West Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium etc.

By 1962, Polio had become almost extinct in United States.

All of that being history, it should be used as inspiration by the administrators of our country. As the Chief Secretary, Punjab has stated, ZERO tolerance will be shown against all districts' administration of the province if they fail in achieving targets pertaining to the polio eradication, primary healthcare. Strict action would be taken if targets were not.

About the polio eradication campaign, DCOs were directed that movement of IDPs from FATA should be monitored, especially in Lahore and Rawalpindi divisions, to check the transfer of polio virus. Besides this, he directed DCOs to ensure persistent positive environmental samples which reflect the increase in internal virus circulation. The DCOs were also directed to ensure monitoring of permanent tehsil posts (PTP) at provincial borders as well as monitoring of vaccinators through Android phones.

The eradication of Polio is not an impossible task.

Border area at provincial, divisional, district and tehsil levels should be completely monitored during polio campaigns and measures should be adopted to safeguard the same.

We still have an opportunity to reverse this trend of crippling our future generation and join the rest of the world on the finish line on eradication. Let us make eradicating polio our national duty.