



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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# NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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Note for the press N°16  
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## **KANO, NIGERIA, INFORMS WHO OF THE INTENTION TO RESUME POLIO IMMUNIZATION CAMPAIGNS**

### **Travellers to Nigeria should ensure up-to-date polio vaccination**

**Geneva** - The World Health Organization (WHO) has been informed by the Governor of Kano, Nigeria, of the intention to resume polio immunization campaigns there in early July. This is further to confirmation from the Governor that he accepts that the oral polio vaccine is safe and effective. Training for the July campaigns began on Saturday, 26 June and the Governor has requested assistance from WHO in planning and implementation of the campaigns. WHO and other partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative have offered their full support.

These developments coincide with discussions between the Director-General of WHO, Dr LEE Jong-wook, the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the federal Minister of Health, and requests from WHO member countries for advice on the status of the polio epidemic in Nigeria. The resumption of immunization campaigns in Kano is now critical to rapidly increase population immunity and to help contain the international spread of polio from Nigeria which is key to the global effort to eradicate the disease.

Countries across the African continent and the world are increasingly concerned about the rate at which wild poliovirus continues to spread internationally from northern Nigeria since immunization activities were suspended late last year. Ten previously polio-free countries across Africa have now been re-infected, most recently the Sudan, where a case in Darfur was confirmed last week.

"I welcome these steps towards the resumption of polio immunization reported by the Governor of Kano," commented Dr LEE. "To date, the ongoing suspension of immunization campaigns in Kano has put thousands of children in African countries at risk of polio paralysis. The suspension has also resulted in the re-emergence of polio in countries which had been polio-free. If the campaigns were not resumed in Kano, a twenty year, three billion dollar effort involving 20 million people to eradicate polio would be in jeopardy."

Because international travellers to northern Nigeria remain at high risk of polio, it is important that they protect themselves by being up-to-date with vaccination against poliomyelitis as outlined in WHO's *International Travel and Health*. A booster dose of polio vaccine is recommended four to six years after the primary series of vaccinations. Any individuals intending to travel to Nigeria should have completed a full course of polio vaccination, as recommended by their national governments.

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The poliovirus can, however, infect persons who have been vaccinated, and they can spread the virus. Poliovirus carried by such persons has caused outbreaks of polio in the past.

In order to ensure that all possible measures are considered to prevent the re-emergence of endemic polio in countries previously polio-free, WHO has begun a consultative process with experts to evaluate additional measures that might be required to prevent the further international spread of wild poliovirus from northern Nigeria.

WHO will continue to monitor, with federal and Kano state authorities in Nigeria, the impact of the July polio immunization campaigns and provide additional advice, if required.

Note to editors:

The *Global Polio Eradication Initiative* is spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF. The poliovirus is now endemic in only six countries, down from over 125 when the Global Polio Eradication Initiative was launched in 1988. The six remaining polio-endemic countries are: Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Niger, Afghanistan and Egypt.

The polio eradication coalition includes governments of countries affected by polio; private sector foundations (e.g. United Nations Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); development banks (e.g. the World Bank); donor governments (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America); the European Commission; humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations (e.g. the International Red Cross and Red Crescent societies) and corporate partners (e.g. Aventis Pasteur, De Beers, Wyeth). Volunteers in developing countries also play a key role; 20 million have participated in mass immunization campaigns.

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