



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

# NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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## POLIO CONTINUES TO SPREAD IN CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICA

### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC BECOMES 7<sup>TH</sup> POLIO-FREE COUNTRY TO HAVE OUTBREAK CAUSED BY POLIOVIRUS IMPORTED FROM NIGERIA

**Geneva** - A case of paralytic poliomyelitis due to type 1 poliovirus, with onset of paralysis on 16 December 2003, has been confirmed approximately 200 km north of Bangui, in the Central African Republic. The virus detected is linked to viruses circulating in northern Nigeria in 2003, where polio immunization campaigns have been suspended since August 2003.

The Central African Republic had not reported polio cases since July 2000. This latest case follows the reporting of paralytic polio due to type 1 poliovirus from northern Nigeria spreading to other previously polio-free countries in west and central Africa, namely: Benin (1 case), Burkina Faso (7 cases), Cameroon (1 case), Chad (5 cases), Ghana (8 cases) and Togo (1 case).

It is critical that Nigeria immediately resume its polio immunization campaigns in the north, to boost population immunity and stop the spreading polio outbreak and the continuing risk it poses to children in countries across west and central Africa.

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