

India leads global progress on polio eradication: WHO

India reported over 200 polio cases in the last four months - nevertheless the World Health Organisation (WHO) Friday complimented it for doing much better than other endemic countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

Bruce Aylward, director, Global Polio Eradication Initiative at the WHO, said India has made immense progress and 'appears closest' to achieving the polio eradication goal. He was in India to assess the progress made by India in the field.

'Just 12 months after the WHO director general Margaret Chan launched the intensified polio eradication effort, India is closest of the last four polio endemic countries on eradication of Type 1 (P1), with the lowest number of cases in the key reservoir areas,' Aylward said while interacting with health ministry officials here.

He reaffirmed that eradicating the deadly P1 virus would require responding to any new case with immediate and large-scale vaccination campaigns covering over two million children each time.

'In 2008, there are only 12 cases of P1 in all of Asia - four each in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, in contrast to over 100 cases in Nigeria.

'Among Asian countries, India is clearly the closest to stopping P1 as key areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have made tremendous progress in reducing P1 cases,' he said.

India can expect fewer polio cases in 2008 as compared with the last two years - 870 cases in 2007 and 674 cases in 2006 - with P1 nearing interruption and the P3 outbreak curtailed, he said.

P1 is the most virulent form of poliovirus that spreads faster and handicaps the affected person more frequently than the P3 virus. The only other type of polio, Type 2 (P2), was eradicated in 1999.

'P1 transmission continues in reservoir areas of Pakistan's Sindh province and Afghanistan's southern region,' Aylward said.

There is no P1 case in Uttar Pradesh this year and only one in Bihar.

Delhi, Orissa and West Bengal have reported one P1 case each during the last four months. Of the 203 cases reported this year (till April 25), Bihar reported 157 cases and Uttar Pradesh 40.

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