

# Talking points: why does polio matter?

Here are some key points to make in your letter. Still being relatively new to her development portfolio, it's vital that Foreign Secretary Liz Truss hears loud and clear why polio eradication is so important, not only to end a dangerous disease forever, but also to help build strong health systems that will protect people into the future.

- Polio is a crippling disease that once blighted tens of thousands of lives worldwide, but in recent decades has been 99% eradicated.
- Wild polio now exists in only two countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, but it is highly infectious and without continued vaccination and global monitoring, it could return.
- Health workers and volunteers from Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) have helped the fight against COVID-19 and are crucial in building strong health systems.
- The UK has long been a leading donor to the GPEI, and in 2019 committed to spending £400 million for the period 2020-2023.
- This would help vaccinate more than 750 children a minute against polio in low- and middle-income countries around the world and help support 20 million health workers and volunteers.
- UK is amongst a few donors to provide unrestricted funding that enables GPEI to be flexible, plan ahead and do more effective work. The UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget was cut in 2021, with polio funding disproportionately cut by 95%, and only £75 million has been disbursed so far.
- The UK should honour the commitment that it has made to eradicate polio forever by providing £100 million a year for the period 2020-23.

## Take to social media!

If you can take action, thank you! If you've written a letter, or if you have less time, why not share the importance of eradicating polio on social media? For World Polio Day 2021 (24 October), the GPEI shared these [social media assets, including suggested tweets, images and videos](#), which demonstrate why the fight to #EndPolio matters for children around the world. To try and reach decision-makers with your tweets, tag @FCDOGovUK and @trussliz.

## Watch these videos!

Why not watch some videos as a group? You could also share them on social media and with others. For example, [WHO's Science in 5: Polio & COVID-19](#) (5 minute clip about how polio infrastructure has helped in the fight against COVID-19), ['The Endgame: the quest to vaccinate the world and eradicate polio'](#) (30 minute documentary about the final push to eradicate wild polio) or one of the many videos on [the GPEI website](#) and in the [World Polio Day social media toolkit](#).

# Case study: COVID-19 shows value of polio infrastructure to support resilient health systems

As COVID-19 reached Somalia, Mohamed readied himself to respond. For years, he had been building strong relationships with local health officers and communities to deliver polio vaccines to every child. Now, he would use those relationships to try to track the spread of the pandemic.

In Nigeria, Dr Rosemary Onyibe, a Polio Eradication Zonal Coordinator for WHO, felt her duty was calling. “My expertise is needed to serve my community,” she remembers thinking. Within days, she was working on Nigeria’s COVID-19 response.



Mohamed, the Regional Polio Eradication Officer for Banadir, Somalia, participates in an integrated immunization campaign held in September 2020 with strict COVID-19 safety measures in place. In addition to their polio duties, programme personnel have provided substantial support to the pandemic response. Image credit: WHO Somalia

These two individuals are part of a team of 5923 polio eradication personnel, who pivoted in a matter of weeks to fight COVID-19 in some of the most vulnerable settings in the world. A recent [report](#) published by WHO comprehensively documents the significant role played by polio eradication personnel during the pandemic, and urges strong action to sustain this network to deliver essential public health services after polio is eradicated.

The polio programme has a long history of stepping up during health emergencies

to fill the gaps that exist in health systems. As COVID-19 changed lives around the globe, polio staff led outbreak response teams and trained laboratory staff to detect the virus. Polio disease surveillance officers searched for COVID-19 cases and thousands of frontline polio workers shared information on the disease with their communities. In some countries, polio emergency operations centres were converted for the pandemic response. As the situation has evolved, so have polio programme contributions – in coming months, the programme plans to use its expertise in immunization to help to deliver COVID-19 vaccines, as well as urgently reach at least [80 million children](#) who have missed out on vital vaccines during the pandemic.

Story and images from the GPEI. Read the full story [here](#).