

# ASK YOUR MP TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO ERADICATE POLIO

THIS MONTH, CALL ON THE UK NOT TO TURN ITS BACK ON GLOBAL EFFORTS TO ERADICATE POLIO.

Polio, a debilitating and highly contagious viral illness, mostly affecting children, used to be a serious worry for families across the world. Once a rampant epidemic, polio can paralyse children's muscles, so that in the most severe cases they can't breathe on their own. Thanks to the introduction of vaccines and global efforts for effective immunisation programmes, wild polio virus now remains endemic (widespread within a particular region or population) in two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan. The world is so close to eradicating polio - global incidences of polio have decreased by 99% - but this can't be taken for granted. We need the UK Government to continue to invest in polio eradication efforts through the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and deliver on its existing pledge of £50 million over the next 3 years - and also ensure that this isn't affected by the current halt on 'non-essential' Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending. The Government must show continued and stronger support by making a higher pledge at a pledging event in Berlin on 18 October 2022, for GPEI's full strategic period up to 2026.

- Since the GPEI's establishment in 1988, more than 2.5 billion children have been immunised against polio, thanks to the cooperation of more than 200 countries and 20 million volunteers.
- The UK has a long history of supporting the GPEI, having provided £1.38 billion of funding since 1995 to help end polio.
- It is essential that the GPEI's 'Polio Eradication Strategy 2022-2026' is fully resourced and implemented, to ensure a [world free of all forms of polio](#).
- Recent developments of new cases of wild polio in Malawi and Mozambique, and [poliovirus found in sewage samples in London](#) and other places, are stark reminders that until polio is eradicated, we can't be complacent.

## What is the Global Polio Eradication Initiative?

The [Global Polio Eradication Initiative \(GPEI\)](#) is a public-private partnership led by national governments with six core partners including the World Health Organisation (WHO), Rotary International, UNICEF, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Its goal is to eradicate polio worldwide and ensure that no child ever again suffers paralytic polio.

## The fight to end polio must continue

The GPEI has been playing a vital role in strengthening healthcare systems worldwide to help end polio. Since its inception in 1988, GPEI has helped reduce the approximately 350,000 cases each year across 125 countries to just over 1,600 cases in 2021 of all types of poliovirus. Over the past ten years, over [10 billion doses](#) of oral polio vaccine have been given worldwide. In the same period, in the absence of this vaccine, more than 6.5 million children would have been paralysed by wild poliovirus. Healthcare workers and infrastructure set up for polio eradication efforts have also proven invaluable in the [surveillance and support for other health concerns](#), such as COVID-19.

Since 2015, Nomina Akhtar has been part of Pakistan's polio programme as a community health worker. Despite being diagnosed with cancer, Nomina continues to vaccinate children against polio. Determined that she will defeat both, this provides a great source of strength for her. "At least cancer has treatment," she says. "Polio is incurable and the sooner we end this disease forever, the better." Read more about Nomina's story [here](#).



Nomina Akhtar © WHO/Muhammad Shoaib

However, in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, polio campaigns were disrupted for approximately four months. This has added to the challenge of eradication and though the window of opportunity for eradication may be narrowing, with the right funding and political will, it is possible. Any form of poliovirus anywhere is a threat to children everywhere. Other variants can emerge in under-immunised populations, if a weakened strain can circulate in the environment over time, it can potentially mutate to a form that can cause paralysis, called vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV).

## The UK and Polio Eradication

In 2019, the UK initially made a welcome pledge of £400 million for the period of 2020-23 to GPEI, for which it received global [praise](#). This was equivalent to £100 million per year, but in 2020, only £70 million was disbursed, and then in 2021, the Government made a cut of 95% in funding for polio eradication, resulting in a disbursement of only £5 million. In total, only £75 million of this [pledge was disbursed](#). This pledge has essentially been replaced by a new one of £50 million over 3 years (which is effectively an alarming 70% cut from the commitment made in 2019).

## Why must the UK commit to investing in GPEI now?

The GPEI displayed extraordinary resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by sustaining polio surveillance while also mobilising to support the pandemic response. However, polio was not an exception to the vast disruptions seen in essential healthcare services, and we are starting to see the impact of this now. In recent months, wild poliovirus has been detected outside of the two endemic regions, risking Africa's wild-polio free status with cases being detected in Malawi in late 2021 and four cases in neighbouring Mozambique. Areas that may erroneously see polio as a 'disease of the past' are also witnessing a reminder that, until polio is eradicated, complacency is not an option. Between February and July this year, vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (VDPV2) was [repeatedly detected in sewage samples across London](#), instigating an urgent immunisation campaign response to help [vaccinate and offer boosters](#) to children at risk. Poliovirus has also been found in sewage samples in Israel, and Rockland County in New York State reported its first case of VDPV2 in July after almost a decade. We are therefore asking you to campaign for the UK Government to re-evaluate its commitment to GPEI, given these developments, and to use the pledging opportunity in October as a moment to invest in polio eradication.

## TAKE ACTION!



**Write to your MP, asking them to write to the new Foreign Secretary when they are appointed about the importance of global polio eradication as a vital investment in global public health. You could include these key points:**

1. As a bare minimum the UK Government must deliver on its existing pledge of £50 million over 3 years and it must make sure that this isn't affected by the halt on ['non-essential' Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) spending](#) - as eradicating polio is a public health emergency!
2. The UK must show its continued support for polio eradication at the pledging event in Berlin on 18 October 2022, and commit to investing in the GPEI's full strategic period up to 2026 with a higher pledge than the existing one.

Please note: The Foreign Secretary will need to receive your MP's letter well in advance of the pledging conference on 18 October.



**If you want to do more, please write to local and national newspapers to raise awareness about the importance of investing in polio eradication, and remind ministers that the British public cares about ending this horrific disease.**

Let us know that you've taken this month's action by emailing:

**Campaigns Coordinator Tanya Begum at [tanya.begum@results.org.uk](mailto:tanya.begum@results.org.uk)**