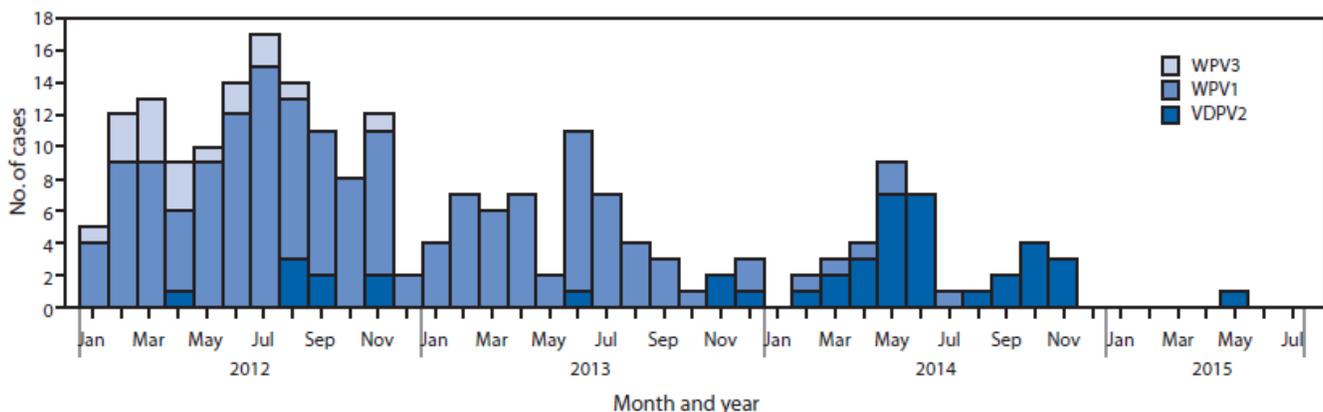


Dear Colleagues,

On July 24, 2015, Nigeria reached a historic benchmark: one year without recording any new wild polio cases. If the pending specimens collected in the past few months are negative for wild poliovirus, there is a high likelihood that Nigeria will be removed from the list of polio-endemic countries in September 2015. This would leave only Pakistan and Afghanistan endemic for polio. August 2015 marked one year since the African continent reported its last wild polio case in Somalia. This progress is real, but we need active and intensified surveillance to detect any poliovirus, as well as the fortified walls of immunity achieved by high vaccination coverage to prevent polio importation and further spread globally.

Nigeria’s accomplishment was made possible by strong political commitment, including at state and local levels, and by continuous, effective innovation and implementation. Innovations include novel approaches to reach children traveling in and out of inaccessible areas, health camps, and detailed vaccination planning to ensure that vaccinators do not miss children. Rigorous training and accountability of surveillance officers in local government areas and the expansion of environmental sampling sites strengthened reporting and detection. The use of Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) is likely to have been important to the progress, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno and Yobe.

FIGURE. Control of polio in Nigeria¹



Nigeria has also placed great emphasis on timely collection and testing of stool samples for all cases of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and timely classification of AFP cases by the National Polio Expert Committee. At this stage, all cases need to be investigated thoroughly and every AFP case and his or her family and neighbors need to be tested promptly to be sure no case of wild poliovirus is missed.

Africa must be free of the virus for two more years, under rigorous surveillance and high levels of protection, before the African Regional Certification Commission for Polio Eradication can certify it polio-free. Therefore, countries need to improve the quality of AFP surveillance and polio vaccination

¹ Etsano A, Gunnala R, Shuaib F, et al. Progress toward Poliomyelitis Eradication – Nigeria, January 2014 – July 2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2015; 64: 878-882. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6432a5.htm?s_cid=mm6432a5_e#Fig3.

campaigns. Ongoing expansion of environmental surveillance across the continent will help identify whether there is silently circulating virus. Last week, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) spearheading partners met in Brazzaville to plan practical ways to rapidly improve surveillance, vaccination campaign quality, and outbreak response in the highest risk African countries. Strengthening surveillance across the continent is critical to ensure that there are no areas of Africa with unrecognized spread of polio, as occurred in Cameroon for several years before the 2014 cases were identified and transmission stopped.

Stopping all outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus is now more crucial than ever; the world will not be polio-free until all poliovirus transmission is stopped. The ongoing outbreak of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 1 in Madagascar requires full support to interrupt transmission, and African countries need to improve vaccination rates, especially in areas with low coverage and among vulnerable populations.

On 25 September 2015, the Polio Oversight Board will hold an in-person meeting in New York City, during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, to set strategic direction for the remainder of 2015 and 2016 and to provide guidance on key program issues and decisions, including financial oversight. We need to understand whether the comprehensive national emergency action plans of Afghanistan and Pakistan are being implemented effectively to interrupt endemic wild poliovirus transmission in 2016. Intensified action is needed to extinguish polio's final reservoirs.

As always, thank you for all you do to protect the world's children.



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Chairman, Polio Oversight Board

