

WHO South-East Asia Region on track for implementing polio endgame strategy

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Implementing a monumental change in vaccination that is expected to bring the world closer to eradicating all types of polio, all 11 countries in the WHO South-East Asia Region have "switched" from using the traditionally used trivalent oral polio vaccine (tOPV) to bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV) that protects against the remaining wild poliovirus strains.

The vaccine switch removing 'type 2' component of the oral polio vaccine follows global certification of eradication of type 2 wild poliovirus last year.

The switch also aims at drastically reducing the rare risk of children getting paralysis by oral polio vaccine.

"The world is closer than ever before to ending polio. The switch is a critical step in the Polio Endgame Strategy towards achieving a world free of all types of polioviruses," said Dr Poonam Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia.

The polio vaccine switch, which is complemented with introduction of injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), will boost the Region's efforts to protect children against polio until the crippling disease is eradicated globally.

"The Region was certified polio-free in March 2014 and continues to maintain the polio-free status, despite the risk of importation from the polio-endemic countries. Efforts are ongoing to protect children with polio vaccine, increase routine immunization coverage, focus on the most vulnerable and hard to reach population and step-up vigil against poliovirus importation," she added.

"I would like to congratulate all countries in the Region for successfully implementing the polio vaccine switch, which is the biggest globally coordinated project of its kind in the history of vaccines involving over 150 countries. Countries in the Region made extensive preparations, meticulously planned and implemented the switch in the childhood immunization programme which reaches out to an estimated 37 million children in the 11 countries of the Region annually," Dr Poonam further commented.

