

Polio battle won? No case in India in over 200 days

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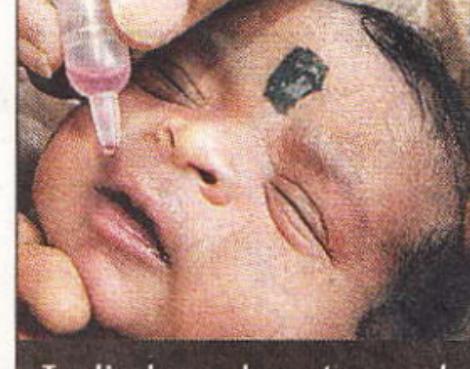
New Delhi: India has not reported a single polio case in over 200 days with the country's only polio case this year coming from Bengal on January 13. India has also become alert to the import of the virus from neighbouring countries. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) says 11 countries are facing outbreaks owing to the import of the virus.

Pakistan is reeling under a polio outbreak (over 100 cases) following the transmission of the P1 strain, and is the only Asian country this year to have reported the P3 virus, which is on the verge of elimination elsewhere in the continent. A cautious New Delhi has intensified surveillance at the Indo-Pak border in Wagah.

In the past month, India has vaccinated 115 children aged below five years, who came into the country from Pakistan, with the bivalent polio vaccine. Rapid response teams trained by the Centre will, from next week, carry out "active case searching operation" in Amritsar and blocks near the border.

"We will visit hospitals in blocks near the border to confirm that we haven't missed a single case of acute flaccid paralysis to spot any signs of polio being imported," Punjab's immunization officer Dr Balwinder Singh told TOI.

"Information boards at Wagah and Attari are asking all those coming from Pakistan to immediately contact the health booth if their children aged below five years feel sudden weakness in any part of the body or have been feeling it over the past six months," he added.



India has also stepped up measures to prevent the import of the polio virus from neighbouring countries

GPEI has said that of the 1,002 cases reported in the past 12 months globally, only 290 were reported in the last six months, showing a substantial slowdown in polio transmission.

There has been an almost 40% decrease in cases this year (429) as compared to last year (706). Three out of the four endemic countries and two out of the three re-established transmission nations have seen a spurt in cases this year. Indian immunization officers are administering the vaccine to children who arrived either at the Wagah border or at the Attari railway station since September 13.

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that Pakistan is exporting polio virus. "Travellers to and from Pakistan should be fully vaccinated, and travellers to the country who in the past have had three or more doses of oral polio vaccine should have another one before they travel. Some countries require travellers from Pakistan to be fully immunized against polio before they grant an entry visa," it has said.