



PAHO highlights 31 years without polio in the Americas and calls to strengthen vaccination efforts

Despite the Americas being certified polio-free in 1994, only 83% of children received the third dose of the polio vaccine in 2024 — well below the 95% needed to prevent outbreaks.

Washington, D.C., October 23, 2025 (PAHO) — On World Polio Day (October 24), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) celebrates over three decades without wild poliovirus cases in the Americas. PAHO continues to highlight the importance of strengthening vaccination coverage to prevent a possible resurgence of this preventable disease.

“A few decades ago, parents lived in fear for their children’s health — sudden fever, pain, muscle weakness, and sometimes permanent paralysis. That was polio, an incurable disease that could cause lifelong disability or even death,” recalled Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO Director. “Thanks to vaccines and a tremendous collective effort, it has now been 31 years since wild poliovirus last circulated in our region. This is an extraordinary public health achievement.”

Polio affected thousands of children across the Americas until the early 1990s. In 1975, nearly 6,000 cases were reported, and the last case of wild poliovirus was detected in Peru in 1991. This milestone led to the certification of the Americas as the first region in the world to be declared polio-free in 1994.

However, PAHO emphasizes that maintaining this status requires renewed commitment and sustained action. In 2024, only 83% of children in the Americas received the third dose of the polio vaccine — well below the 95% coverage recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure herd immunity.

Poliomyelitis is a viral disease that attacks the nervous system and can cause permanent paralysis, mainly in children under five years of age.

Most cases are asymptomatic, but one in every 200 infections results in paralysis, and between 5% and 10% of those affected may die due to respiratory paralysis.

Globally, polio cases have decreased by more than 99% since 1988, when an estimated 350,000 cases occurred annually in more than 125 countries. Today, only two countries continue to have endemic circulation of wild poliovirus.

Risks remain in areas with low vaccination coverage, where vaccine-derived polioviruses can mutate and spread in unvaccinated communities, leading to outbreaks like those caused by wild virus. Robust epidemiological surveillance and the strategic use of a variety of vaccine formulations mitigate this risk while maintaining focus on the global eradication goal.

“Protecting, strengthening, and following immunization program recommendations is an act of love, solidarity, and shared responsibility among governments, health workers, communities, and each of us,” Dr. Barbosa emphasized.

A call to action

PAHO urges all sectors and social actors to take decisive action to keep the Americas polio-free:

- **Parents, caregivers, and guardians:** Check children’s vaccination records and visit health services if in doubt.
- **Health workers and community leaders:** Provide clear information, counter misinformation, and continue being trusted sources in their communities.
- **Governments and decision-makers:** Ensure sufficient resources to strengthen national immunization programs and maintain active surveillance.

On World Polio Day, PAHO reaffirms its commitment to the global eradication of this disease and to protecting future generations from preventable health threats.

Since before the elimination of wild poliovirus in the Americas, PAHO has worked with countries across the region and strategic partners to achieve

and sustain this historic milestone—providing ongoing technical cooperation, supporting vaccination campaigns, and strengthening surveillance. PAHO has also helped ensure access to safe and effective vaccines through joint purchases at affordable prices via its Revolving Fund.

Links

[Poliomyelitis](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

mediateam@paho.org

www.paho.org

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system (OAS).