

JOINT EVENT

31st Euro Global Summit and Expo on Vaccines & Vaccination

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4th World Congress and Exhibition on Antibiotics and Antibiotic Resistance

June 14-16, 2018 Barcelona, Spain

Polio: An international threat**Randa S Hamadeh¹ and Magdi Sharaf²**¹Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon²WHO, Egypt

On 8 June 2017, World Health Organization announced an outbreak of polio in the Syrian Arab Republic. As at 16 January 2018, 74 cases have been confirmed as part of the outbreak. The median age of those infected is 15 months. This is the second outbreak of poliovirus to hit Syria since the onset of its humanitarian crisis in 2011. Unlike the first wild poliovirus outbreak in 2013, the current outbreak is a result of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type-2 (cVDPV2). Circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus can occur in rare instances when population immunity against polio is very low. In these settings, the weakened virus found in the oral polio vaccine (OPV) can spread between under-immunized individuals and over time, mutate into a virulent form that can cause paralysis. The only way to stop transmission of vaccine-delivered poliovirus is an immediate immunization response, the same as with any outbreak of wild polio. With high levels of population immunity, the virus will no longer be able to survive and the outbreak will come to close. Since confirmation of the cVDPV2 outbreak, there has been a concerted effort by outbreak response partners in conjunction with the Government of Syria and local authorities to stop transmission. WHO and UNICEF have jointly undertaken two mass vaccination rounds in affected areas. Both rounds were completed with more than 395,000 children vaccinated. In addition, targeted vaccination activities have also taken place in high risk areas of the country. The second phase of the outbreak response is currently underway. To facilitate the response, social mobilization teams have deployed to visit community leaders, pediatricians, local council workers and camp managers, and are conducting house-to-house visits to raise community awareness of the need for vaccination. Activities to strengthen surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) – a major indicator for polio – are ongoing across the country. Contact sampling from all AFP cases continues and stool samples are being taken from healthy children arriving from known infected areas as well as from silent districts (districts that have not reported AFP cases in 2017). This situation urged neighboring countries to take immediate action. Lebanon is one of those countries most affected by the Syrian crisis due to geographical and cultural aspects that link the two countries. Lebanon, and since the onset of the Syrian crisis, has received more than 2M displaced and the displacement movement is ongoing even at a lower rate, the thing that necessitated the initiation of vaccination points at border line areas and at UNHCR registration centers in addition to ongoing national campaigns targeting 0-5 children regardless of nationality and of previous doses to maintain Lebanon polio free. Those activities became more focused nowadays targeting low coverage areas or areas of high density population where displaced has settled especially after April 2017 where bOPV was globally introduced to replace tOPV. To close, Polio is an international threat, one case of polio anywhere is polio everywhere. International communities should take immediate action toward securing more funds to guarantee vaccines availability and to channel more support to the health sector in general.

Biography

Randa S Hamadeh, a graduate of the American University of Beirut (AUB), is the head of the Primary Health Care and Social Health department, and the manager of Immunization and Essential Drugs Program at the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. She is the coordinator of the Universal Health Coverage Project run jointly with the World Bank. She holds an MPH degree, a PhD in Public Health, and a Vaccinology Diploma. She contributed to creating a PHC network in Lebanon through which preventive programs and community health initiatives are initiated, usually involving local municipalities and NGOs. Dr. Hamadeh contributed to the introduction of the PHC facility accreditation program in Lebanon in 2008, and is the vice chair of the national accreditation committee. Dr. Hamadeh has actively participated in the foundation of various NGOs. She is the author of many public health papers and booklets. She is the preceptor of AUB Public Health students joining the PHC department for their residency programs since 2011. She contributes yearly as a lecturer and a panelist to International conferences in Public Health and Vaccines and she is an ADVAC (Advanced vaccinologist) member and an active participant in SAGE (Strategic Advisory Group of Experts) Global meetings. Dr. Hamadeh contributed to the partnership created among the ministry of Health and the Academia. She is a member of various National vaccines and Public Health technical committees. She participated in her capacity as a Primary Healthcare expert and a lecturer in the 36th anniversary of ALMA-ATA Declaration in 2012. Dr. Hamadeh was elected for a Public Health Excellence Award, Delta Omega, Honorary Society of Public Health from the American University of Beirut in June 2017. She was nominated for the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award in 2014 and was also nominated for Randa Bdeir Leadership Award at AUB for 2017. She was recently nominated to be the "Ambassador of Health in the Arab Countries" by the Arab League and the Arab Hospital Federation.

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