



Health Watch Weekly Update

NEWSLETTER

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January 28: "Around 400,000 children miss polio vaccination." says report

Some 400,000 children missed the vaccination initiative mounted as part of this year's first nationwide anti-polio drive, according to documents available with *The Express Tribune*.

Around 58,631 parents refused to get their children inoculated against the crippling disease. During the initiative a total of 34.7 million children were reportedly vaccinated against the set target of 35.5 million.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) recorded the highest number of parental refusal cases with 36,985 followed by Sindh 14,646, Balochistan 5,176, Punjab 962, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) 515, Islamabad 275, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) 36. There were no refusals in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). Overall coverage of the anti-polio drive remained up to the mark in all provinces except Balochistan (74%) and Fata (55%). Punjab remained on top with 104%, Islamabad stood second with 103% followed by AJK and G-B with 102%, Sindh 97% and K-P 95%.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 28: Primary schoolteachers refuse to participate in polio drive

Primary schoolteachers in Swat have refused to participate in the polio vaccination drive in the district and carry arms to school for students' safety.

Members of the All Primary Teachers Association (APTA) protested outside Swat Press Club on Tuesday and said they were not willing to take part in the vaccination drive and would not accept a deduction from their salaries.

Leading the protest, a senior member of the association, Ibrahim Shah Bacha, said providing security to schools is the responsibility of the government, not teachers.

APTA Swat Spokesperson Zafarullah Khan added the polio duty is the collective responsibility of all in the education department, not just primary schoolteachers. "We are just asking the government to involve all middle and high school teachers in the drive as well," said Khan.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 27: Mental health: Dare to think by Muhammad Hamid Zaman

From children who are marginalised to the mothers who have seen trauma to adults who resort to violence because of the battles that rage within them, mental health, and its challenges in Pakistan, remain both a taboo and a subject mired with misconceptions and mysteries. We will come to some of the misconceptions in just a bit, but let us start with our attitude that needs to change.

Mental health challenges, just like any other health crisis, personal or collective, are a serious business and should not be the fodder of our jokes. It's time we recognise that it is highly offensive to make fun of anyone struggling with a mental ailment, just as it is extremely inappropriate to make fun of a cancer patient or someone who is battling a heart disease. It's time we stopped using the 'R' word or terms that demean those who are fighting some of the biggest battles of their lives with everything that they have.

Now, let us come to some common misconceptions present in our society. In the light of the [Peshawar tragedy](#), there was some discussion about psychiatric support and counseling, which is a step in the right direction. But there is a common misconception that [mental health problems](#) emerge only after a traumatic event.

There are successful examples, such as the Saving Brains initiative from Grand Challenges Canada, that is creating both a global awareness and providing grant support all across the world to innovative ideas that can change the tide. The BRAIN initiative from the US government is also a step in recognising that understanding the brain and its function and malfunction is the next frontier. Our own next frontier lies in changing our attitudes.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 26: PM's polio cell challenges apex body's decision

The prime minister's polio monitoring cell has challenged the decision of the apex committee, consisting of politicians and army officers, to follow the Sehat ka Insaf programme of the KP government against the crippling disease.

The committee took the decision at a meeting held here on January 22. However, the KP provincial departments are confused to implement the direction of the federal authority as international departments and the United Nations (UN) agencies have already appreciated the Sehat ka Insaf model.

It may be noted that the 'Sehat ka Ittehad' plan will start from February 1 and will end in May. As many as 12 one-day campaigns would be held in the 12 weeks. The campaigns would be held in 12 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and three districts of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (Fata). The army has promised all-out support and security for the campaigns.

[DAWN](#)

January 25: The polio front

Pakistan's bloody war against polio continues along the same patterns seen last year, with terrorists unleashing fury on health workers attempting to deliver polio drops to children and on those deployed to protect them. On Monday last week in Karachi, a city that has seen attacks on polio workers before, a policeman was shot as he accompanied an anti-polio team into the Orangi area of the Sindh capital, where a four-day localised drive was planned. The constable was shot by two motorcyclists who drove past the vaccinating team.

The campaign in Sindh was resumed Thursday after a three-day gap. The attack that caused this disruption mimics those seen in 2014, when at least 65 health workers were killed in different parts of the country by terrorists in an attempt to prevent the vaccine reaching children.

The government, from time to time, calls meetings and issues statements. Public awareness campaigns have been launched, involving clerics, celebrities and other prominent figures. But on the ground nothing seems to change; polio continues to take its toll; those trying to prevent it are targeted and it seems the authorities can do little except look on as this process continues. There are no signs to suggest anything resembling success against the disease. Can we hope that our new-found resolve to defeat and eliminate extremism will also lead to a change in the situation on the polio front?

[The News](#)

January 25: Polio drive extended as targets missed

The late arrival of security personnel forced the vaccination teams to restrict their working

hours from eight to four, it emerged on Sunday.

Health officials revealed that due to security concerns, the vaccination teams had failed to achieve their targets in most areas. "It is the main reason for extending the campaign so that we can cover the remaining areas," a health official told *The Express Tribune*.

On Sunday, the sixth day of the polio campaign in the city, polio workers in districts Korangi, Central and South were unable to achieve their targets due to the lack of security arrangements. "Yes, the drive has been extended," confirmed the Extended Programme on Immunisation deputy project director for Sindh, Dr Durre Naz Jamal.

She explained that it was not possible for polio workers to go in some areas where their presence was risky. "The issue of provision of security personnel has been raised before top officials," she added.

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