

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride

URGENT COMMUNICATION

HSS(MD) 24/2010

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Consultants in Infectious Disease
Consultant Virologists
Consultant Neurologists
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Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

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AN ROINN

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Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD)24/2010
Date: 2 July 2010

Dear Colleague

POLIO OUTBREAK IN TAJIKISTAN – ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS AND CLINICIANS

I am writing to inform you about an ongoing polio outbreak in Tajikistan and to ask that you review the vaccination status of those intending to travel to the area and offer vaccination as appropriate. It is also important that you consider the possibility of polio in those travelling from Tajikistan and neighbouring countries that have symptoms of paralysis.

In April this year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed cases of imported wild poliovirus in Tajikistan – the first to be reported in the WHO European region since it was declared polio-free in 2002. Since then the number of cases has increased substantially with more than 200 cases confirmed. Tajikistan shares a border with Afghanistan and the current outbreak is occurring in areas bordering Afghanistan. Wild poliovirus remains endemic in Afghanistan.

The government in Tajikistan, with support from WHO and other partners, has instigated three rounds of polio vaccination. Whilst this programme appears to have had an impact on the outbreak in the area, it is not yet under control and more cases are expected to be identified. Furthermore, there have now been reports of cases imported by the surrounding countries of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and a few cases to more distant

locations in the Russian Federation. The conflict in Kyrgyzstan may make it more difficult to contain the spread of polio from the area.

The latest update (23 June 2010) on the situation from WHO is at:

www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/poliomyelitis/publications/2010/who-epidemiological-brief-tajikistan-polio-outbreak-and-regional-response

As the outbreak is likely to continue and there is now evidence of spread of cases from the area, I wanted to make you aware of this ongoing situation and provide the advice set out below.

Advice for travellers

Advice for travellers to the area was issued by National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) following initial identification of the outbreak:

http://www.nathnac.org/pro/clinical_updates/polio_tajik_270410.htm

I recommend that this advice is followed i.e. that all those travelling to Tajikistan should have completed their primary vaccination course against polio and that they are offered a booster dose of a polio-containing vaccine if they have not received one in the last 10 years. Information on the administration and supply of polio-containing vaccines is set out in the polio chapter of the Green Book (*Immunisation against infectious disease*):

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_108823.pdf

Travellers to the area should also be advised to follow the guidance provided by NaTHNaC to minimise the risk of polio transmission:

www.nathnac.org/pro/factsheets/polio.htm

Advice to clinicians

Clinicians should be aware of the possibility of polio infection in individuals that have recently arrived from Tajikistan or neighbouring countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan) and are showing signs of acute flaccid paralysis (including Guillain-Barré syndrome). All suspected cases of acute flaccid paralysis should be investigated by the submission of stool samples for virological testing. Additional investigations may also be of help and cases can be discussed with the Consultant Virologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital (028 90 635239).

The process for investigating and responding to suspected cases of polio is set out in the National Standard Method for Surveillance of Polio in the UK:

www.hpa-standardmethods.org.uk/documents/qsop/pdf/qsop31.pdf and also the polio chapter of the Green Book:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_108823.pdf

Specific local inquiries can also be directed to health protection staff at the Public Health Agency Duty Room (028 90 553997/994).

Yours sincerely



Dr M McBride
Chief Medical Officer

This letter is available at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk and also on the DHSSPS Extranet which can be accessed directly at <http://extranet.dhsspsni.gov.uk> or by going through the HPSS Web at <http://www.n-i.nhs.uk> and clicking on DHSSPS.