

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Doctors International fighting polio on the frontline in PNG

The recent reports of confirmed polio cases in the Lae region of PNG, almost 20 years after the country was given the all clear, has the PNG National District Office of Health (NDOH), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and doctors at Australian Doctors International (ADI) very concerned. In response, a mass immunisation program has been rolled out in PNG.

Polio is a crippling and potentially deadly viral disease that spreads easily from person to person if left untreated. While there is no cure for those infected with polio, the spread of the disease can be prevented through vaccination. Before the vaccine was developed in 1955, thousands of people around the world were paralysed or killed by polio every year.

ADI is very aware of the re-emergence of polio because it deploys Australian doctors to PNG to treat and train in rural and remote areas. With over 85% of the population of PNG living in these areas, getting vaccines to remote areas is a challenge. Working alongside the WHO, PNG NDOH and Catholic Health Services (our partners in PNG), Australian Doctors International will next week assist with round three of a mass polio immunisation program beginning with the remote Star Mountains region of Western Province.

Getting the immunisations into this remote region presents significant challenges. There's a lack of transport, long travel distances to reach aid posts and health centres and the challenge of keeping vaccines in cold chain.

ADI's Dr Charlie said: "The polio vaccine needs to remain chilled however there are few if any refrigerators and very little electricity in the region so we will need to work fast once we arrive. The WHO has chartered a flight and our team will pack the immunisations in ice in a specially

designed esky. We will have between two and three days to go from house to house, village to village, to immunise every child aged 0-15. We will also be offering health services along the way for other members of the community as required.”

“Our team expects to vaccinate almost 1,000 children over these three days which will be a significant positive step in combatting the current polio outbreak in PNG.

“I’m fortunate to work with ADI and partner with the WHO and local health providers to help reach the communities who need us the most in PNG. Our patrols, such as this one, are effective because we don’t just go in, treat people and leave again. We invest in local community health workers, training and building capacity on the front line.”

Australian Doctors International (ADI) will continue to respond not just to polio immunisation challenges in PNG but also delivering much needed general health services in rural and remote communities with the help of its dedicated doctors, local healthcare workers and with the support it receives from partners in Australia and PNG. **For more information on the work of ADI and how you can support them, visit www.adi.org.au.**

About ADI

Australian Doctors International (ADI) is a not-for-profit, non-government development aid organisation with no religious or political affiliations. Its vision is to work for a healthier Papua New Guinea by providing healthcare to rural and remote areas of PNG through its development programs.

ADI is committed to delivering and strengthening primary health services to rural and remote communities in PNG. Key to doing this is the focus on reducing preventable diseases through public health programs, health education and health promotion. ADI also works to increase the capacity of health workers to manage and deliver primary health services through training and education.

www.adi.org.au

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