

Pakistan claims progress in tribal polio vaccination

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Pakistan Tuesday claimed progress in vaccinating thousands of children against polio in a tribal area bordering Afghanistan which had been inaccessible due to unrest for about three years.

Officials feared that more than 165,000 children in the tribal district of Khyber had gone without the vaccine since 2009 because of fighting between government troops and warlord Mangal Bagh.

[Polio vaccination](#) campaigns in rural Pakistan have long suffered because of rumours they are a plot to sterilise Muslims and in July the Taliban banned them in the northwestern tribal region of Waziristan to protest against US drone attacks.

"Our target was to vaccinate up to 25,000 children in Bara and some 32,000 children in Tirah valley in Khyber and 70 percent success has been achieved," top [social welfare](#) officer for tribal areas Aftab Durrani told AFP.

"In the next two to three days the rest of the children will be vaccinated."

The restive tribal district has been the scene of military operations for the past five years and there had been no [immunisation](#) in Bara and Tirah valley since 2009.

"We have adopted a multi-pronged strategy. In some areas troops accompany the vaccination team and provide them security, in some areas we have talked to local elders and in some areas even we have talked to militants to do vaccination," he said.

The prime minister's top [polio eradication](#) official Shehnaz Wazir Ali said: "It is a big breakthrough as Tirah was the most difficult area to access for vaccination."

"We tried to clear the doubts and suspicions in the minds of local population and convinced them that

polio vaccination had no bad effects on a child's health."

Asked about the troubled North and South Waziristan tribal districts, she said: "We are also making efforts to launch polio vaccination campaigns in other tribal areas."

Khyber Health officer Azam Wazir said 33 inoculation teams, each comprising four people, were administering polio drops, measles and other vaccines to [children](#) under five years of age.

Vaccinations in Khyber started on August 28 and would continue until September 8, he said.

The highly infectious disease affects mainly the under-fives and can cause paralysis in a matter of hours. Some cases can be fatal.

The Lancet medical journal has said vaccination problems last year led to Pakistan's highest number of polio cases in a decade, 198, compared to 144 in 2010.

Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria are the only three countries where [polio](#) remains endemic.

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