



Dear Sirs,

Greece, Italy and Cyprus as part of the WHO European Region, are a safe zone where poliomyelitis is under control and children are routinely vaccinated. However, an increasing amount of refugees arriving in these countries could change the current situation.

As it is widely known, the war in Syria and surrounding areas results in migration of a huge number of people. Greece, Italy and Cyprus are closely located to the above areas and are currently receiving a large number of refugees (more than one million so far). Most of them are fleeing across the border to these countries and stay there for a shorter or longer period of time, before they spread out across Europe.

We are deeply concerned with the refugees' health condition, particularly with regard to their vaccination status. The existence of polio virus in their countries of origin (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan), is clearly highlighted by the below references (including a number of WHO documents). Another concern is the fact that in many parts of these countries, due to the current war, most vaccination programs including 'supplementary immunization activities' (SIAS) have been suspended.

Given the above, and in addition to the appearance of polio cases in these areas (please find attached relevant references), there is an obvious expansion risk of polio virus, in the first-line countries mentioned as well as in other receiver countries in Europe. Moreover, other preventable epidemics, like measles, still prevailing in Europe may be triggered by the refugee situation and particularly affect the migrant population.

For this reason, the European Academy of Pediatrics (EAP) and all three paediatric societies of the first-line countries recommend mass vaccination of refugees with one dose of live oral vaccine against polio (OPV). We recommend vaccination of every refugee, regardless of the vaccination status in his/her country of origin. OPV can either be given in the country of entry or in the countries of destination. We strongly recommend vaccination in the country of entry which we consider the most appropriate and effective approach to prevent the potential spread of epidemics.

This proposed "supplementary immunization activity" could contribute to the global effort of WHO for the eradication of polio from the planet. Furthermore, such an effort will protect susceptible inhabitants, particularly children of European countries as well as the migrant population.



European Academy of Paediatrics
Paediatric Section of U.E.M.S (European Union of Medical Specialists)



In our view, while giving first priority to polio prevention, as mentioned above, vaccination against other preventable epidemiological threats like measles has to be considered, too.

We would very much appreciate your opinion and prompt reaction concerning the above initiative.

All of us, striving and working for a better future regarding children's health, can only be deeply concerned about the effect of mass immigration, which along with other inhumane consequences and experiences for these people, also threatens to overthrow the global health map with highly severe infections.

We kindly ask you to support an initiative for a vaccination program targeting all refugee children as a part of the registration process when entering Europe.

Sincerely yours,

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