

# Fewer polio cases in India this year

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

**Mumbai:** For the first time in 22 years, the Union government seems to have finally gained the upper hand in the war against polio. Only 20 polio cases were reported from across the country till May 10, 2010, as against the hundreds registered in the same period in the past few years.

In 2008, 279 cases of polio were registered till May and in 2009, 351 cases were reported in the corresponding period.

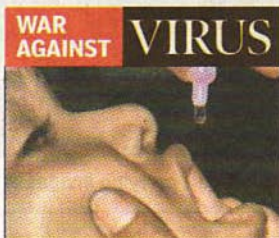
According to health officials from both the government as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO), this positive trend could be the result of the bivalent polio vaccine, which has been introduced in the immunisation programmes in certain pockets since January 2010.

"It is a great step in our fight against polio," said WHO regional team leader Dr Ravindra Banpel. "Better reach of immunisation rounds and surveillance have worked for us. To some extent, the bivalent vaccine has also given us desirable results," he added.

The bivalent vaccine works against both strains of polio—P1 and P3—unlike monovalent vaccines that work only on one strain. In India, monovalent vaccines

are used for national and routine immunisation programmes. An exception was made a few months ago for the high-prevalence states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the bivalent vaccine was introduced.

"Mumbai is yet to get the bivalent vaccine," said Dr Mangala Gomare, who is in charge of immunisation



## Polio cases in India in last 5 years:

2005	66
2006	676
2007	874
2008	559
2009	741
2010*	20

\*(till May 10)

with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Of the 20 cases this year, 17 were of the less virulent P3 strain while three were caused by the P1 strain. Incidentally, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra are the only states where P1 cases have been reported this year.

"P1 is worrisome and dif-

ficult to contain," said Gomare. She, however, added that it was perhaps too early to rejoice. "We will have to wait and watch till monsoon when the number of cases goes up," she said.

Amidst talks of eradication, an old debate has resurfaced: the use of Inactivated Polio Virus vaccine (IPV) that has to be injected, unlike the present oral polio vaccine (OPV).

"IPV has to be brought in if we want to eradicate polio. But OPV has to be simultaneously used in the rounds even if eradication is achieved," said Dr Deepak Ugra, president of the Indian Academy of Paediatricians (IAP). "We have been prescribing IPV for a decade now," he said.

A senior government official said that even the policy makers are in favour of IPV. "However, logistical problems and cost factor are being looked into now," the officer said.

About three years ago, the India Expert Advisory Committee had recommended that the Union government should initiate a multi-armed trial to look at various formulations of IPV and its potential use.

Banpel, however, said talking of eradication of the disease would be premature now. "We have to patiently wait and watch," he said.