

# Polio-free city: 3 yrs & counting

## But Mumbai Still Among Three High-Risk Zones In State

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

**Mumbai:** On Friday, India completes an entire year of not reporting a single polio case, something the country has never witnessed before. From here, the war against polio only gets more challenging, said experts. Mumbai has not reported any polio case in the last three years, but has made it in the list of high-risk districts in Maharashtra.

The first 365-day period of not reporting any polio case means India will soon be dropped from the list of 'endemic' countries. India shares a place in the list along with three other countries—Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria—who are yet to stop polio transmission. However, the 'eradication' status will be awarded to India only if there are no traces of transmission of the polio



Pic used for representational purpose

virus for the next two years.

Speaking to TOI, union health ministry's deputy commissioner (immunization) Dr Ajay Khera said, "We should be removed from the endemic list by the World Health Organization. For this, polio virus transmission throughout January and environmental sewage sampling has to be negative, and hopefully it will be." He added the fight has to remain aggressive as neighbouring countries like Pakistan are

still reporting polio cases.

Khera added that the preparation for post-eradication phase has begun. "We have made surveillance whether stringent paralysis cases are polio or not," he said. He also added that the country has been divided into high, moderate and low risk areas and a similar distinction has been made at the state level too.

As per the division, the city is a high-risk district in the state. The city's sewage samples have been free of the wild polio virus since 2010. Besides Mumbai, Thane and Nashik too have figured in the list of high-risk districts.

State immunization officer Dr VM Kulkarni said migration makes the three districts prone to importation of the virus, both from within as well as outside the country. "We are training our medical

officers to respond to an emergency situation, or an instance of resurgence of the virus," he said. Maharashtra, like most other states, has already formed the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan team to tackle any trace of the virus systematically.

The last new polio case in India was reported on January 13 last year. In 2010, there were 42 cases, a steep fall from 741 in 2009, which was nearly half of the global polio cases. Regional team leader of WHO, Dr Ravindra Bapel, added that laboratories too have to become extremely cautious regarding containment of the virus. "No one wants a virus to slip out of a laboratory, especially when it has been omitted from the community," he said. Meanwhile, cross-border immunization efforts are underway.