



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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Department Memorandum

No. 2014 - 0103

To: All RHO Directors, Secretary of Health ARMM, Chief of Hospitals, LGUs and others concerned

Subject: Intensifying Surveillance for Poliomyelitis through Acute Flaccid Paralysis Surveillance (AFP) in the Philippines among Children <15 years old

The Philippines was certified polio-free in October 29, 2000 along with the other countries in the Western Pacific Region (WPR). The most common presentation of paralytic poliomyelitis is Acute Flaccid Paralysis. Following WHO standards, the Philippines uses the Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) surveillance to investigate and confirm/ rule out suspected poliomyelitis cases using globally recommended laboratory test procedures. Since certification, the country remained polio-free. However, due to the diminishing quality of the AFP surveillance performance and areas with low polio vaccine coverage in many regions, the country has been classified at high risk for wide-scale polio outbreak in case of wild poliovirus importation.

While efforts are initiated to increase the population immunity against polio through strengthening of routine polio vaccination at the community level, AFP surveillance continues to suffer. Over the past five years, the number of AFP cases reported from the respective hospitals and epidemiology and surveillance unit continue to decline, resulting to an AFP rate of less than one per thousand population.

Low reporting rate can be attributed to the gaps in AFP case detection: (1) it is usually limited to passive reporting from the hospitals and (2) identification is based on the diagnosis of AFP, and (3) general body weakness is sometimes mistaken as AFP. The term Acute Flaccid Paralysis is NOT a diagnosis. It is a syndrome that could be manifested by several diseases, such as Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), Traumatic Neuritis, Transverse Myelitis or other neurologic diseases resulting to sudden onset of floppy paralysis or lameness of the extremities.

Poliomyelitis causes lifetime disability and could even lead to death. We should keep the Philippines polio-free forever! Just last week, the South East Asian Region has been certified polio-free leaving only Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan as the last remaining countries harboring wild poliovirus. So much progress has been achieved globally that the world is getting closer to becoming polio-free.