

# **Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination**

## **Press Release**

\*\*\*

### **Japan to provide substantial support to Regional Polio Laboratory**

Islamabad, 2 March 2018—The Government of Japan has announced today that they will be providing 3.2millionUS dollars for the procurement of equipment for the Regional Reference Laboratory for polio eradication, located in the National Institute of Health in Islamabad.

With the procurement of state-of-the-art molecular-biology equipment including genetic analysers, real time PCR machines, incubators and freezers, among others, the laboratory will significantly enhance its sample processing capacity. Through this new equipment, the Regional Reference Laboratory will improve the speed of the results reported from the stool samples that it receives, of people suffering from acute flaccid paralysis, in addition to samples taken from the sewage in areas identified as being at risk of polio. In 2017 alone, the Regional Reference Laboratory tested 30 000 stool samples and 950 environmental samples coming from both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In addition, the Japanese grant will be used to replace aging stocks of cold chain materials, reagents and other essential equipment needed to be able to accurately isolate and identify wild poliovirus from stool and environmental samples.

In an event hosted by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, the Notes corresponding to the grant were officially signed by the representatives of the Government of Japan, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and World Health Organization (WHO).

Speaking at the signing ceremony, the Federal Minister of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Mrs Saira Afzal Tarar said: “The steady support of the Government of Japan and other partners, and the strong partnership have been crucial elements of the programme’s tremendous progress over the past two years. The new grant will help strengthen polio surveillance through adaptation of new technology and contribute towards polio eradication in the country.”

H.E. Mr Takashi Kurai, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan said: “Maintaining the strong polio surveillance system that has been established in Pakistan remains critical for eradication work. We are pleased to be a part of this honourable initiative. However, in order to eradicate polio altogether from Pakistan, it is not sufficient to promote vaccination activities. We should also address the unawareness of the matter among the people and the need for building up of the necessary infrastructure for enhancing the activities. Japan will continue to support Pakistan for polio eradication from a wider perspective in order to achieve the complete eradication of polio.”

Mr Yasuhiro Tojo, Chief Representative, JICA Pakistan Office said: “JICA has been supporting the polio programme and routine immunization since 1996 and 2001 respectively”. He further added: “I sincerely believe that through the concerted implementation of this grant aid, the polio surveillance system will progress across the provinces and districts. This will improve the routine immunization situation in the country including polio that will help the government of Pakistan not only to eradicate polio but also to sustain polio-free Pakistan after eradication.”

Pakistan’s Polio Eradication Programme has come a long way towards building a future in which polio no longer endangers children, families, and communities across the country. Only eight polio cases were recorded in 2017, compared to 20 in 2016 and 54 in 2015. “Japan’s support comes during a critical time when the role of polio surveillance, particularly a well-functioning laboratory, is more important than ever,” said Mr Christopher Maher, Polio Eradication and Emergency Support Manager, WHO.

The Government of Japan has supported the Polio Eradication Initiative in Pakistan since 1996. Approximately 24billionYen (224 million US dollars), including this grant of 3.2 million US dollars has been given to Pakistan to strengthen the Polio Eradication Programme and curb this crippling disease.

(Sajid Hussain Shah)  
PRO to Minister for NHR&C  
0300-6305306