

Vaccination

# Global Update | Torn by Fighting, Two Countries Fall Behind in Campaign Against Polio

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Published: April 1, 2008

Fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan meant that [polio](#) eradication did not go well in those countries in 2007, a [World Health Organization](#) report said last week.

They are two of the last four nations that have not eliminated the disease (others are India and Nigeria).

In Afghanistan, most cases were in southern provinces under [Taliban](#) control. In Pakistan, many were in the remote tribal border areas where [Osama bin Laden](#) is still being pursued and local militants are battling the government.

Polio experts see the territory differently: as one “epidemiological block” with two transmission corridors, one in the mountainous north, where cases of the polio strain known as Type 1 are common, and one in the flatter south, where Type 3 prevails. (Type 2 was eradicated in 1999.) Tribes migrate east-west across the borders, following harvests, trade routes and jobs. Polio went as far southeast as Karachi, where there is no fighting, but [immunization](#) drives “remain weak,” the report said. Crowded slums and petty corruption disrupt efforts, an expert said. The report spoke of a breakthrough in August when the Taliban started letting vaccinators work in their territory. “We dialogue with [NATO](#) and tell them, ‘These are the days of our campaigns, these are our people — don’t bomb them!’ ” said Dr. Bruce Aylward, the campaign’s director.

Eradication requires mustering thousands of health workers every few months to visit homes and give vaccine drops to every child under 5. Both countries tried to vaccinate their whole populations four times in 2007, and each held seven regional drives.