

8th Meeting of the Regional Certification Commission for the Polio Endgame in the Region of the Americas

Final Report



Left to right: Mark Pallansch, Arline King, Jose Luis Díaz Ortega, Angela Gentile, and Eliseu Waldman

Lima, Peru; 3 December 2017

Internal Report

Not to be circulated among the countries

The Regional Certification Commission for the Polio Endgame in the Region of the Americas (RCC) met for the 8th time on 3 December 2017. Members present at this meeting were Dr. Arlene King, RCC Chair and medical specialist in public health and preventive medicine; Dr. Jose Luis Díaz-Ortega, epidemiologist; Dr. Angela Gentile, infectologist; Dr. Mark Pallansch, virologist; and Dr. Eliseu Waldman, epidemiologist. Two RCC members were not present, Dr. Rosa Alba Salas, virologist, and Dr. José Félix Sánchez Largaespada, pediatrician.

In attendance, representing the secretariat, were Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz, Chief of Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit (FGL/IM); Dr. Ana Elena Chévez, Regional Advisor, FGL/IM; Dr. Gloria Rey, Regional VPD Laboratory Advisor, FGL/IM; Andrea Villalobos, Containment Consultant, FGL/IM; Elizabeth Thrush, Specialist, FGL/IM, Daniela Dietz Chavez, Immunization Consultant, FGL/IM; Eduardo Rivero, Communication Specialist, FGL/IM; and Dr. Deblina Datta, CDC epidemiologist, member of the Risk Assessment Task Team (RATT) .

The objectives of the 8th meeting of the RCC were: to discuss the recommendations from the Global Certification Commission (GCC) and the next steps for the Regional Certification Commission; to discuss advances on the harmonization of the global, regional, and national risk assessments; to review country-specific challenges for very high risk countries – Guatemala, Haiti and Venezuela; and, to review the initial proposal for an annual update report from countries on polio eradication status and activities conducted for risk mitigation.

Country delegations from the three high risk countries (Haiti, Guatemala, and Venezuela) were invited to private sessions with the RCC to present a report on challenges that they are facing with polio eradication activities, including meeting coverage goals and surveillance indicators. Each country presented a risk analysis that they conducted and actions they are taking in order to mitigate the identified risks.

Conclusions and Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ANNUAL REPORT OF POLIO ERADICATION ACTIVITIES

1. PAHO should refine the proposed annual report template to be reviewed at the next RCC meeting.
2. PAHO should consider the following when finalizing the proposed report template:
 - The report should focus on certification criteria related to population immunity and surveillance, to the district level.
 - The report should include a component for risk assessment, with more points given to controllable risk factors.
 - The report should include a section to report on plans to mitigate the risks identified.
 - Supplementary information should be included as an annex, and not in the body of the report, including the switch report, containment report, and demographic information. A link summarizing what is in the annexes, which are related to variables in the risk assessment (eg, status of containment) could be included in the body of the report
 - The annual report template should include a short statement for the NCC chair to sign when submitting the report to the RCC.
3. Once approved by the RCC, PAHO should share the template with countries.
4. NCCs should request a copy of these reports in order to review the information, make recommendations to the countries, and share the validated report with the RCC through the Secretariat, along with a signed statement of its review (as above).
5. For the first report, for 2018, PAHO will pre-fill some information from previous years using existing country-level data held at the Regional level
6. PAHO should ensure a structured timeline for annual reports, for example:

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|---|---------------------|
| PAHO sends report template and request to countries along with JRF | March |
| Countries fill in, validate, or edit the information in the report, complete the risk assessment, develop and implement risk mitigation plan. | June |
| NCCs meet to review the report, identify gaps and weaknesses, and provide recommendations | June-July |
| NCCs share validated annual report along with signed statement to the RCC | August |
| RCC reviews country report | September - October |
| RCC meets to discuss the annual reports | November |

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONTAINMENT

7. Countries that have not finalized phase 1 containment activities should do so as soon as possible and submit an updated report to the NCC and RCC, no later than August 2018.
8. Countries that are planning to have PEFs should nominate a National Authority on Containment (NAC) as soon as possible, and no later than December 2018.
9. The Secretariat will draft a letter containing feedback to the 5 NCC of countries that submitted an updated containment report .
10. PAHO should again convey clear information to countries about what is required from PEFs, as there appears to be lack of clarity among countries about what it means to have a PEF – including the financial implications of being certified as a PEF and fulfilling primary, secondary, and tertiary safeguards.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON COMMUNICATION

11. PAHO should put in place a communication strategy to highlight the work of the Region and the countries in fulfilling the objectives of the Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan.
12. PAHO should work on developing the story line of why polio eradication is so important, in order to address the risk of complacency.
13. PAHO, together with the RCC should work on documenting the regional polio certification process, and its impact on overall health system strengthening (Dr. Arlene King/ Dr Ana Elena Chevez).
14. PAHO, together with the RCC, should ensure documentation of the containment process in the Region (Angela/Gloria).
15. The RCC should ensure continuous communication with NCCs and the PAHO Regional Director:
 - The RCC chair will send an update to the PAHO Director by the end of the year.
 - The RCC chair will send a letter to the very high risk countries of Guatemala, Haiti and Venezuela in Q1 2018, to include their observations, concerns and to offer recommendations.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Guatemala

- The RCC commends Guatemala for completion of phase 1 of containment.
- The RCC is concerned about surveillance indicators and coverage, at national and sub-national levels. These need to be addressed urgently and critically.
- PAHO should support the identification of the fundamental challenges related to maintaining polio-free status in Guatemala.
- The RCC is concerned about the ability of Guatemala to maintain polio-free status, and meet global certification standards.

Haiti

- RCC is concerned about surveillance indicators and coverage, at national and sub-national levels. These need to be addressed urgently and critically.
- PAHO should continue to provide technical support to help Haiti with the fundamental challenges related to maintaining polio-free status,

- PAHO should support the country to develop the leadership capacity of the country to coordinate and direct polio eradication activities.
- The RCC is concerned about the ability of Haiti to maintain polio-free status, and meet global certification standards.

Venezuela

- There is an inconsistency between the reported immunization coverage data and the occurrence of vaccine preventable disease outbreaks.
- Based on these data and these outbreaks, the RCC is concerned about the ability of Venezuela to maintain polio-free status, and meet global certification standards.

Conclusions and Recommendations from 5th Regional Polio meeting

- RCC commends PAHO for the polio outbreak simulation exercise that was conducted during the regional polio meeting, which followed the 8th RCC meeting.
- RCC urges countries to review and improve their outbreak response plans and to conduct simulation exercises at national and sub-national levels.
- Countries that have not submitted a response plan should do so by Q1 2018.
- RCC commends PAHO for the efforts to improve IPV supply for the Region and for the development of materials and technical support for countries to advance with the introduction of fractional doses of IPV, as recommended by the TAG in March and July 2017.
- RCC recognizes the countries that have already advanced with preparations to introduce fIPV: Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay.
- RCC encourages the other countries that the TAG has recommended to switch to fIPV, to begin preparation and training of health care workers, to be ready in case the supply situation worsens and they need to introduce fIPV: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.
- RCC encourages all countries, without exception, and regardless of the size of their population, to have a plan in place and be ready to face a stock-out of IPV.

2018 RCC Work Plan

- PAHO and the RCC should present to the GCC proposed global certification standards, according to the data that is available in the Region and most pertinent to ensuring polio-free status, such as surveillance, population immunity, and event/outbreak preparedness and response plan. The certification standards should address identified country-level risks to maintaining polio-free status, such as importation and subsequent transmission of WPV or VDPV; emergence of VDPV; and, containment breaches. The actual certification standards also should be tailored to the risk status of the country (very high or high/medium/low risk).
- The next RCC meeting should be held in February 2018. The objectives of this meeting will be to:
 - Review and finalize the annual report that countries will be requested to submit in the third quarter of each year
 - Review the certification risk assessment that will be presented to the GCC for feedback

- Advocate with Mexican health authorities for completion of Endgame activities, and conduct visits with national health authorities to the national polio laboratory and BIRMEX.
- The RCC will review Annual Reports of high risk countries (list them as per the risk assessment done by PAHO)
- RCC will send a letter to Guatemala, Haiti, and Venezuela, in Q1.
- RCC will send feedback to the countries that have submitted updated containment reports .

General Observations:

- There should be sufficient time allotted in the agenda for RCC meetings to allow for discussion on each topic and to formulate next steps.

PAHO should review how many reports are being asked from the immunization programs, and deadlines, and align the request for an Annual Report from NCCs, to avoid overwhelming countries with the additional work.