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WORLD POLIO DAY: GET YOUR CHILDREN VACCINATED TODAY

Pretoria: The Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi calls on parents and caregivers to have every child under the age of five years vaccinated against Polio, an incurable but preventable childhood disease.

"As long as a single child remains unvaccinated from this potentially fatal infectious disease, all other children playing attending school with him/her are at risk of contracting polio, hence we recommended that children under the age of five be immunised against this most common childhood disease at the nearest healthcare facility", said Minister Motsoaledi.

While there is no cure for Polio disease which mainly affects children under 5 years of age, it can be prevented through effective immunisation which protects children for life. In 2017, Minister Aaron Motsoaledi launched the National Polio and Measles immunisation campaign as part of the global campaign to eradicate this disease.

Polio is caused by a very small germ called the polio virus and can lead to permanent lameness, deformity and even death. However, due to routine immunisations in childhood, polio has not been seen in South Africa since 1989, but there have been outbreaks of polio in neighbouring countries.

The initial signs and symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, constipation or less commonly diarrhoea, neck stiffness and pain in the limbs. Sudden flaccid paralysis.

In most severe cases, the poliovirus attacks the motor neurons of the brain stem, reducing breathing capacity and causing difficulty in swallowing and speaking. Without adequate respiratory support, this form of polio, called bulbar polio, can result in death.

"Immunisations for childhood vaccine preventable diseases are available free of charge at all public health facilities, hence we urge all parents and care givers to bring along the Road to Health Booklet when they take their children for immunisation," added Motsoaledi.

The last case of polio was reported in South Africa in 1989. But as long as there are still cases of wild poliovirus anywhere in the world, polio can easily be imported and spread within another polio free country if all children have not been fully vaccinated

Polio can be eradicated for the following reasons:

- Polio affects only humans, there is no animal reservoir
- Effective, safe and inexpensive vaccine is available
- No long term carrier state exists
- Immunity is life long

According to the **South Africa Health and Demographic Survey 2016 report**, universal immunisation of children against common vaccine-preventable diseases is crucial to reducing infant and child mortality.

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