

ISLAMABAD, [Sep 24](#) (APP) President Dr Arif Alvi [Monday](#) said Pakistan was expected to become polio-free country by next year as the number of cases reported had been reduced to just four this year against hundreds in the past.

Talking to media after launching three-day nationwide anti-polio campaign, he said all the vaccination teams deserved applause who had been serving to purge the country of this deadly virus despite life threat in certain areas.

He was accompanied by Minister for National Health Amir Kayani, representatives of international organizations including World Health Organization and UNICEF besides senior government officers.

The president who earlier launched the drive by administering vaccine to two children living in a slum here, also appealed the people to extend all out support to the vaccination teams so that the country could get rid of the disease.

He also urged the religious scholars to play their role to nullify the misconceptions about the polio vaccine.

He also lauded the role of armed forces and other security agencies who had been providing security cover to the vaccination teams.

In 2014, 306 cases had been reported, 54 in 2015, 20 in 2016 and 8 in 2017. In 2018, only four polio cases had so far been reported from two districts including three from Dukki area of Balochistan and one from Charsadda.

The health minister said the credit for remarkable reduction in polio cases went to the vaccination teams who had been striving to protect the children from deadly disease.

He said Pakistan was one of three polio-endemic countries in the world with Afghanistan and Nigeria being rest two states.

The president also interacted with two polio workers Muhammad Iqbal and Shahnaz and conveyed his greetings to the polio vaccinators.

Talking to APP, Coordinator National Emergency Operation Centre Dr Rana Muhammad Safdar said Pakistan was closest ever to its goal and this drive was a final push towards interruption of polio virus.

The campaign is fully synchronised with Afghanistan to ensure effective vaccination of mobile children as well.

The three-day drive would target a total of 38.6 million children aged below five including 19.22 million in Punjab, 8.88m in Sindh, 6.75 m in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including tribal districts), 2.5m in Balochistan, 0.7m in AJK, 0.237m in GB and 0.33m children in Islamabad.

During this campaign, Vitamin-A supplement will also be administered to around 35 million children aimed at boosting immunity against all infectious diseases including measles. A total of 260,000 personnel would strive to achieve the set targets across Pakistan.