

Syria sees first polio cases in three years: WHO

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Three new cases of polio have been recorded in Syria in the first outbreak of the virus in the country since 2014, the World Health Organization and a partner initiative said.

The new cases were registered in the oil-rich province Deir Ezzor, the majority of which is controlled by the Islamic State group and where a siege of the capital has restricted access to basic goods for some of the population.

An outbreak hit the province in 2013-2014, when 36 cases were reported, according to the Polio Global Irradication Initiative.

WHO spokeswoman Sona Bari told AFP on Thursday that the new cases are from a different strain of the virus.

The current form of the [virus](#) mutated from strains in the oral [polio](#) vaccine, the initiative said, as opposed to the "wild" polio which caused the last [outbreak](#) and led to the vaccination of millions of children in the Middle East.

"Circulating (vaccine-derived polioviruses) are extremely rare forms of poliovirus...that can emerge in under-immunised populations," it said in a statement.

"Although access to Deir-Ez-Zor is compromised due to insecurity, the Governorate has been partially reached by several vaccination campaigns

against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases since the beginning of 2016," the initiative said.

"Outbreak response plans are being finalized," it added.

Meanwhile medical journal *The Lancet* reported that [health care workers](#) , clinics and hospitals were attacked more than 400 times last year in Syria's civil war.

A total of 402 such attacks—many of them fatal—were registered between November 2015 and December 2016, it said.

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