Effects of India's new polio policy on travellers

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For the Ministry of Health policy on polio vaccination for travellers see <http://mohfw.nic.in/WriteReadData/18925/8285260748RequirementofPolio%20vaccination%20for%20International%20travellers%20between%20India%20&%20polio%20infected%20countries.pdf>

In March, 2014, India celebrated its victory over polio as it was declared polio free by WHO.¹ India is now understandably keen to ensure that it will remain polio free. To prevent re-introduction of polio, the government has instituted a new polio vaccine requirement for travellers from polio-infected countries entering India. The Ministry of Health of India has announced that "resident nationals of the currently seven polio infected countries are required to receive a dose of oral polio vaccine (OPV), regardless of age and vaccination status, at least four weeks prior to departure to India". Furthermore, the Ministry has also put in place the requirement of a dose of oral polio vaccine for nationals from India going to currently polio-infected countries.

Are such drastic measures justified in view of the political ramifications and travel disruptions for international travellers to and from India? International spread of polio via travellers has been a major setback for the endgame of polio eradication. For example, re-introduction of wild-type polio to 24 previously polio-free countries occurred in 2003–06, costing US\$450 million in external funding to bring these importation events under control.^{2,3} In more recent years, the upsurge of polio in Pakistan led to exportation of the virus to the Middle East with new outbreaks.

We attempted to assess how many travellers would be affected by India's new policy. We obtained the numbers of national residents travelling from the seven countries specified in the policy to India from various tourist statistics and the United Nations World Tourism Organization websites (table), and also the number of Indian nationals residing in India travelling to any of these seven countries. These seven countries currently specified by India's policy are Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria; however, the policy includes the statement that the list of polio infected countries may be amended from time to time, depending on polio detection.

For some countries no recent data were available so we included data from 2010 and 2011. No data were obtainable for travel of residents from India to Afghanistan and Somalia. Hence our results are only estimates, but in view of the current political situation, the number of travellers to and from these countries is expected to be small. The table shows that India's new vaccine policy would affect about 234 000 travellers annually from the seven countries to India, and 346 000 Indian national residents to these seven countries. In total, about 580 000 persons would be affected. This number is small by comparison with the grave consequences of re-introduction of polio with ensuing outbreaks and the associated costs

to curb such outbreaks. The logistical and economic ramifications of mandatory polio immunisation for about 580 000 travellers could be substantial, but certainly less than losing the polio eradication endgame.

We declare that we have no competing interests. AW-S is now a member of the IHR Emergency Committee for polio.

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Management of brain arteriovenous malformations

The investigators of ARUBA (Feb 15, p 614)¹ must be thoroughly applauded for conducting the first-ever randomised controlled trial of a therapeutic intervention to improve the prognosis of brain arteriovenous malformations. In view of the antagonism to the trial in some quarters, they were lucky to get even the 223 patient sample size they did, even though it was much smaller than the originally intended 800, subsequently modified to 400. However, they were not so lucky with

	Visitors from India (year)	Visitors to India (year)
Pakistan*	42 694 (2009)*	59 846 (2012)†
Afghanistan*	NA	95 231 (2012)†
Nigeria*	202 200 (2011)*	36 762 (2012)†
Somalia†	NA	555 (2010)*
Syria†	27 346 (2010)*	3586 (2010)*
Ethiopia†	14 607 (2010)*	3797 (2010)*
Kenya	59 000 (2011)‡	34 037 (2012)†
Total	345 847	233 814

*Data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization. †Data from the Ministry of Tourism.⁴ ‡Data from Chakraborty.⁵

Table: Number of visitors to and from India by country