

POLIO ERADICATION ONE STEP CLOSER THANKS TO ROTARY CLUBS

1st September 2008



Members of Rotary Clubs have vowed to back an international campaign to stamp out polio from the world for good.

Rotary Clubs throughout the UK have committed to take up Rotary's \$100 million challenge – a drive to match a recent \$100 million challenge grant given to Rotary by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help the organisation in its quest to wipe out polio for good.

Polio eradication has been Rotary's top priority since 1985. Since then, polio cases have fallen from 350,000 a year to a recorded 1,315 last year. Two billion children have been protected from the disease, and the number of endemic countries has fallen from 125 to just four: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan.

It is estimated that five million children have been spared from disability and 250,000 deaths have been averted.

“We are so close to stamping out polio for good. A world without polio has been Rotary's dream for many years and there are only four countries left to tackle.

“As long as one case of polio remains in the world, no child is safe from this deadly disease. We want to share in the legacy of wiping out a disease that has caused so much disability and death worldwide.”

The clubs will be organising a range of fundraising events over the next three years to help Rotary reach its target.

So far Rotary clubs across Great Britain and Ireland have raised more than £10.5 million to polio immunisation. Across the world, Rotarians have helped contribute £376 million (US \$700 million) to fund polio immunization activities.

Rotary is the key private sector partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which launched in 1988, and works alongside the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in their combined war against polio.

POLIO FACTS AND FIGURES

WHAT IS POLIO?

- Polio is the shortened name of poliomyelitis which is the crippling disease caused by the poliovirus. One in 200 cases result in paralysis, which leads to the limbs of the victim becoming limp and disfigured. Among those paralysed, 5-10 percent die when their breathing muscles become immobilized.
- The poliovirus can strike at any age, but affects mainly children under five years of age. It is passed through person-to-person contact, via oral-faecal route. The virus enters the body through the mouth and multiplies in the intestine. Initial symptoms are fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck and pain in the limbs.
- In the parts of India where polio is still endemic, mass immunisation campaigns are being held 8 times a year to break the chain of infection.
- Polio knows no borders and carriers frequently move from one country to another. Therefore, the virus can reappear in previously polio free countries. In 2007 there were cases of polio in 9 African countries although polio is only endemic in one of them.
- We have not had polio in United Kingdom and Ireland for a long time now, yet many people aged 60 and over will remember warnings about the use of swimming pools or swimming in the sea in hot summers and also the pictures of victims in iron lungs.

- There are still polio victims living in our communities – they have stories to tell.
- Polio is only an air flight away from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

THE PROGRESS

Since Rotary made polio eradication its top priority in 1985 and joined forces with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in 1988:

- Polio cases have fallen from 350,000 a year to 1,315 in 2007
- 125 endemic countries has been reduced to just four; Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan and
- Rotary International is the largest private sector contributor to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative
- Rotary members have raised £376 million (\$700 million) to fund polio immunization activities
- Rotary clubs in Great Britain and Ireland have donated £10.5 million (US\$20 million) to polio immunization initiatives
- Two billion children have so far been protected from the disease
- 5 million have been spared from disability
- 250,000 deaths have been averted

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, whose partners include Rotary International, World Health Organization, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, works to:

- Hold national immunization drives for all children under age five in endemic and high risk countries
- Maintain high levels of routine immunization
- Track possible incidences of the disease
- Re-immunize all areas with reported cases
- Improve public health infrastructures worldwide to strengthen the fight against other infectious diseases

THE CHALLENGE

Challenges faced by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative include:

- Funding
- Political commitment
- Weak infrastructure in developing countries
- War and internal conflict
- Lack of health services
- Difficult-to-reach refugee, migrant, and displaced populations

POLIO TIMELINE

History of Polio

- 1954 - Breakthrough by Dr. Jonas Salk with development of first polio vaccine.
- 1961 - Further advances through development of oral vaccine by Dr Albert Sabine. This allowed for administration of vaccine by trained volunteers.
- 1985 - Start of Rotary International's PolioPlus campaign. Some 125 polio-endemic countries with 1,000 children infected every day.
- 1991 - Last case in the Americas.
- 1996 - 85% reduction in cases with 150 countries polio free.
- 2000 - Western Pacific region polio free.
- 2002 - Europe polio free.
- 2003 - Only endemic in 7 countries.
- 2004 - 23 African countries unite to hold multi-national immunisation day.
- 2005/6 - Development of monovalent vaccines.
- 2006 - Only 4 remaining polio endemic countries – Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. Less than 2,000 cases per annum – a 99.4% reduction.

The position now

- The final 1% will be the most difficult and the most expensive to eliminate. Geographic isolation, armed conflict, cultural barriers, worker fatigue and poverty will all make this difficult.
- In the parts of India that still have wild poliovirus, immunisation is taking place every 6 weeks. The scale of the operation is immense.
- Uttar Pradesh is one of the polio endemic states in India. Lucknow, the capital city, has a population of 2.8 million.
- All children aged 5 and under are being immunised 8 times a year.
- On each occasion more than 800,000 children are immunised.
- In one day, 260,000 children are immunised at 2,728 fixed booths or by the 45 transit teams.
- Approximately 530,000 children are immunised by 1,700 house-to-house teams working Monday to Friday, calling at 900,000 houses as well as camps and slums.
- About 21,000 children are immunised by further teams visiting all the houses not "completed" by the house-to-house teams.
- The work has now been going on for 20 years, with intensification in the last two years. Progress has been made with Type 1 polio (the most devastating and infectious) being significantly reduced in 2007.

ROTARY'S INVOLVEMENT

Rotary International's Involvement

- 1979 - Rotary International (RI) and the government of the Philippines join forces to immunise all children in the Philippines.
- 1985 - RI launches PolioPlus.
- 1986 - RI sets fundraising goal of \$120 million.
- 1988 - Rotarians raise \$247 million. The World Health Organisation (WHO), with the support of 166 governments, resolves to eradicate polio. A partnership (Global Polio Eradication Initiative) is established between Rotary International, the World Health Organisation, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Governments of the world.
- Since 1988 - 2 billion children have been immunised, five million have been spared from disability, 250,000 deaths have been averted. It is estimated that when polio is finally eradicated the savings worldwide could be as high as \$1.5 billion per annum.
- 2003 - A further fundraising campaign successfully raised in excess of the target of \$80 million.

- 2007 - RI and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation jointly pledged \$200 million for polio eradication.
- 2008 - Rotarians have now contributed \$700 million, a figure that will increase to more than \$850 million once polio is eradicated. Yet, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative faces a global funding gap of \$ 490 million for 2008-09, of which \$ 135 million is needed in 2008. The governments of the world, particularly the G8, must continue to make significant contributions.

In addition to raising funds:

- Rotary members in non-endemic countries personally volunteer their time to support the immunisation programme in the endemic countries.
- Rotary members in endemic countries are at the centre of “social mobilisation” in their communities. They seek to ensure that the message gets to the people who are cut off from the mainstream by conflict, geography or poverty and that the children living in these communities are immunised.
- Rotary members in endemic countries volunteer to help with the immunisation events by delivering vaccine in the cold chain, recruiting volunteers, transporting health workers and volunteers and administering the vaccine.
- Rotary members in endemic countries organise and support meetings of religious and community leaders to ensure that the whole community is involved in the programme.
- Tremendous efforts are undertaken during national immunization days: in February 2006, 170 million children were immunised in one day in India.