POLIO

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a paralyzing and potentially fatal disease that still threatens children in some parts of the world. The poliovirus invades the nervous system and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours. It can strike at any age but mainly affects children under five. Polio is incurable, but completely vaccine-preventable.

POLIOPLUS

In 1985, Rotary launched its PolioPlus program, the first initiative to tackle global polio eradication through the mass vaccination of children. Rotary has contributed more than $1.3 billion and countless volunteer hours to immunize more than 2.5 billion children in 122 countries. In addition, Rotary's advocacy efforts have played a role in decisions by donor governments to contribute more than $9 billion to the effort.

GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, formed in 1988, is a public-private partnership that includes Rotary, the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and governments of the world. Rotary's focus is advocacy, fundraising, volunteer recruitment and awareness-building.

POLIO TODAY

Today, there are only three countries that have never stopped transmission of the wild poliovirus: Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Less than 370 polio cases were confirmed worldwide in 2014, which is a reduction of more than 99 percent since the 1980s, when the world saw about 1,000 cases per day.

CHALLENGES

The polio cases represented by the remaining one percent are the most difficult to prevent, due to factors including geographical isolation, poor public infrastructure, armed conflict and cultural barriers. Until polio is eradicated, all countries remain at risk of outbreaks.

ENSURING SUCCESS

Every dollar Rotary commits to polio eradication will be matched two-to-one by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation up to $35 million a year through 2018. These funds help to provide much-needed operational support, medical personnel, laboratory equipment, and educational materials for health workers and parents. Governments, corporations and private individuals all play a crucial role in funding.

ROTARY IN ACTION

More than one million Rotary members have donated their time and personal resources to end polio. Every year, hundreds of Rotary members work side-by-side with health workers to vaccinate children in polio-affected countries. Rotarians work with UNICEF and other partners to prepare and distribute mass communication tools to reach people in areas isolated by conflict, geography, or poverty. Rotary members also recruit fellow volunteers, assist with transporting the vaccine, and provide other logistical support.

‘THIS CLOSE’ CAMPAIGN

Rotary has a growing roster of public figures and celebrities participating in its “This Close” public awareness campaign, including Bill Gates, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, actress Archie Panjabi, action star Jackie Chan, golf legend Jack Nicklaus and South Korean pop-star Psy. These ambassadors help educate the public about polio through public service announcements, social media and public appearances.