

PRESS RELEASE



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POLIO CAMPAIGN TARGETS 750,000 CHILDREN

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia – A total of 1,250 vaccinators and 3,750 volunteers turned out in force to immunise 750,000 children under five years of age in 21 selected woredas in East, West and Southwest Shoa in Oromia Region as part of the Ministry of Health's Sub-National Immunisation Days (SNIDs).

The Ethiopian Government has exhibited a strong national commitment towards eradicating polio in the country conducting supplemental immunisation campaigns since 1996. No case of wild poliovirus has been isolated since January 2001. But Ethiopia is not yet free of the scourge of polio, a crippling disease which needs three years of close surveillance without new cases before the country can be certified polio-free. Efforts are underway to attain certification criteria targets in order to achieve polio free status.

The achievements reached thus far would not have been possible without the existing strong partnership between the Ministry of Health (MOH), Centres for Disease Control (CDC), Rotary International, USAID, WHO, UNICEF, the Government of Japan and other partners. Sixty Rotarians from the US travelled to Ethiopia in support of the polio eradication initiative and helped to monitor the campaign.

To maintain its polio free status, Ethiopia must have a strong importation plan and cross border social mobilisation activities to promptly detect importation of wild poliovirus and effectively implement outbreak response activities. Ethiopia is no longer on the list of priority countries. However, there is the threat of importing wild poliovirus from countries still harbouring the virus due to intense transmission in Nigeria and the recent transmission of poliovirus to Sudan, which borders Ethiopia.

This four-day campaign started 22 October. USAID provided \$400,000.00 through WHO for operational costs with a total of 1.8 million doses of vaccine procured by UNICEF with \$195,000 donated by the Government of Japan.

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The SNIDs are not only for polio eradication, but also to strengthen health care delivery and routine vaccination, while improving services and the skills of health personnel. Vitamin A is administered as well as measles and tetanus immunisation.

The SNIDs serve as a reminder of every Ethiopian's right to health and survival. These rights must be secured by all, including policy makers, religious leaders, the private sector, the media, UN agencies, Donors and communities. Adequate human, material, and financial resources must be made available to guarantee polio eradication and consolidate gains made to build an effective routine EPI programme.