

FAST FACTS: POLIO IN AFRICA

A REGION AT RISK

In 2004, Africa recorded approximately 85% of all polio cases in the world (1037¹ cases). An epidemic caused by a suspension of immunization campaigns in Nigeria, and spurred by low immunity across the region, re-infected 12 previously polio free countries and re-established transmission in five (Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and Chad). A massive immunization response from African countries in autumn of last year was hampered by conflict in Sudan, where vaccinators found it hard to reach children, and in Cote d'Ivoire, where campaigns were halted due to civil unrest.

TAKING ACTION

To close down the epidemic, 23 African nations will come together in 2005 to synchronize mass immunization campaigns aiming to reach x million children. The first round of campaigns will be conducted from 25 February-1 March, the second from 9-12 April and a third round will be conducted from 14-17 May. Participating countries are Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo and Uganda. In many countries, Vitamin A will be delivered with the vaccine to boost children's immunity. Similar campaigns in 2000 and 2001 stopped polio in all but three African countries.

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

It is feasible to stop polio globally by end-2005. But this goal can only be achieved if every un-immunized child is reached. The success of polio eradication depends political determination to hold high quality campaigns that deliver the vaccine to the hardest-to-reach children – those living in remote communities, conflict zones or refugee camps, with little or no basic healthcare. However, the global polio eradication initiative is facing a critical funding shortfall of US\$75 million for 2005 and US\$200 million for 2006.

SO MUCH IS AT STAKE

There has been a massive global investment to date in the fight against polio - over US\$3 billion and countless volunteer hours. Stopping transmission in Africa would be a just return on this investment, proving we can work together to reach development targets. National and global leaders have given their full support to achieving this important goal: the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the G8 have all committed to providing the necessary funds and oversight until polio has been stopped.

THE GLOBAL PICTURE

The remaining six endemic countries are in Asia (India, Pakistan and Afghanistan) and Africa (Nigeria, Niger and Egypt). Between 2003 and 2004, transmission halved in Asia (335 vs 186, the region's lowest ever rate) but more than doubled in Africa (448 vs 1037). The Africa epidemic continues to export the virus to polio-free countries, most recently into Saudi Arabia. This proves that polio anywhere is a threat to children everywhere.



Urgent funding of US\$50 million is urgently needed to conduct polio immunization activities in 2005. The synchronized polio campaigns will immunize millions of children in 23 countries. Photo: UNICEF WCAR/Kent

Polio cases in endemic countries	2003	2004	Transmission re-established	Re-infected
Nigeria	327	786	Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan.	Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Togo.
India	223	134		
Pakistan	99	53		
Niger	25	25		
Afghanistan	4	4		
Egypt	1	1		

THE GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is the largest public health effort of all time. Launched in 1988 and spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF, the Initiative is a unique collaboration of governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society and over 20 million volunteers. Through a combination of national immunization campaigns, support for routine immunization infrastructure, disease surveillance, and fast response to outbreaks, this initiative has cut the number of polio cases by more than 99% - from 350,000 per year to under 1,300 last year. Because of this initiative, five million children are walking today who would otherwise have been paralyzed.

¹ All data as of 16 February 2005