



Partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative

FAST FACTS: POLIO & SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA - A REGION AT RISK

Polio anywhere is a threat to children everywhere

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 organisations, the private sector, civil society and over 20 million volunteers. Through a combination of national immunization campaigns, improved routine immunization, surveillance, and rapid response to outbreaks, this bold initiative has cut the number of polio cases by more than 99% - from 350,000 per year to just 784 last year. Five million children are walking today who would otherwise have been paralysed.

Polio Eradication – The Global Picture:

The six remaining polio-endemic countries are in Africa & Asia: Nigeria, Niger, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Egypt. Asia is very close to driving out polio, with only 93 cases in the region compared with 197 by the same date last year. Yet, over the next few months, Africa faces risk of the largest epidemic of polio in recent history - threatening thousands of children and jeopardising our common investment in a polio-free world. Polio is fighting back, fuelled by low immunity levels and spreading across borders to paralyse children in areas that were formerly polio-free.

Sub-Saharan Africa – A Region At Risk:

The vast majority of global polio cases are now found in Nigeria – 544 out of 717 cases as of 22 Sept 2004. In 2003, Nigeria and Niger were the only two countries in the region to have endemic polio transmission. But with a suspension of immunization campaigns in the Nigerian state of Kano, polio has spread to 12 other African countries - as far as Botswana (3000 miles south), and Sudan (1000 miles east). Africa accounts for approximately 90% of all polio cases this year, with transmission approaching epidemic rates. This resurgence of polio in Sub-Saharan Africa is the single biggest threat to the global eradication initiative.

Taking Action – Synchronized Polio NIDs:

To avert a public health tragedy, 23 African nations will come together to synchronize mass immunization campaigns reaching over 80 million children in Africa's largest-ever, co-ordinated health initiative for children. Over 4 days, tens of thousands of vaccinators will travel house-to-house to deliver the polio vaccine to every child. Participating countries are (endemic) Nigeria, Niger (re-infected) Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Togo, Sudan; (high-risk) Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The first round of campaigns will be conducted from 8-12 October and the second from 18-22 November (with vitamin A supplementation). A third round will be conducted during a synchronized measles campaign at fixed sites from 13-19 Dec in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Togo. Another series of polio immunization campaigns will be launched in spring 2005.

The Challenges Ahead:

The success of polio eradication will depend on high quality campaigns that deliver the vaccine to the hardest-to-reach children, including for example, those living in marginalised communities, conflict zones, nomadic groups or refugee camps. However, the initiative is facing a critical funding shortfall of US\$200 million through 2004-5, of which US\$35 million is urgently needed by November 2004.

There's So Much at Stake:

Stopping polio in Africa will boost faith in our collective ability to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and bring the international community closer to its development goals. We have already invested so much to create a legacy for future generations. US\$3 billion and countless volunteer hours have already been dedicated to a polio-free world. Polio eradication depends on these synchronized campaigns because the poliovirus does not respect international borders, which is why polio anywhere is a threat to children everywhere.



Urgent funding of \$35 million is needed by November to conduct emergency polio immunization activities in Oct & Nov 2004 in 23 African countries, 22 of which are in West & Central Africa. The synchronized polio campaigns will immunize +80 million children under 5 years, with vaccinations taking place house-to-house to reach each child. Photo: UNICEF WCAR/Kent Page