
GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE LAUNCHES 2010–2012 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR INTERRUPTING POLIO WORLDWIDE

GENEVA, 17 June – A broad range of stakeholders formally launched the new Strategic Plan 2010–2012 for eradicating wild poliovirus.

Polio eradication sits at a critical juncture. Across Africa, 10 of the 15 previously polio-free countries re-infected in 2009 have successfully stopped their outbreaks. Key endemic countries are witnessing historic gains against the disease. Nowhere is progress more evident than Nigeria, where case numbers have plummeted by more than 99% – from 312 cases at this time last year, to three in 2010. In India, for the first time ever, the remaining endemic states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have not reported any wild poliovirus type 1 cases concurrently for more than six months.

The meeting in Geneva was held to build on the gains already made in 2010 and to galvanize new action on polio eradication. The World Health Assembly welcomed the new plan while expressing deep concern about the US \$1.3 billion funding shortfall (out of a budget of US \$2.6 billion) over the next three years. This financing shortfall is a serious risk to the eradication of

polio – activities are already being cut back or postponed due to a lack of funds.

The Ministers of Health of Nigeria, Afghanistan, Angola and Senegal, among a number of other senior health ministry officials, existing and potential funders, vaccine manufacturers and key partner organizations attended the meeting – co-hosted by WHO Director-General Margaret Chan and the new UNICEF Executive Director Tony Lake – to discuss the implementation, monitoring, economics and financing of the new plan.

Dr Margaret Chan called on the international funding community to stand tall for polio eradication. “The next three years, and especially the next 12 months, are critical to the polio eradication initiative and, by extension, the entire international public health agenda.”

The new plan builds on major lessons learnt to date, including findings from a major independent evaluation examining

Contd. on page 191

Cont. from page 185

the remaining barriers to eradication. It introduces district- and area-specific strategies to target the ever-shrinking remaining reservoirs of poliovirus, exploits the game-changing bivalent oral polio vaccine to increase the impact of immunizations, and tackles health system weaknesses. The success of this plan now hinges on implementation of activities at field level and the provision of adequate financing.

Partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative are examining every possible option to seek fresh funding while managing existing cash flow to limit any threat to the immunization plan. The risk of not stopping polio in endemic countries was made clear when a large type-1 outbreak originally from India spread to Tajikistan early in 2010 where, to date, it has paralysed 239 children. Tajikistan had been polio-free since 1997. This highlights the urgency of capitalizing on recent gains made in the polio-endemic countries.

“Rotary believes the new Strategic Plan provides the blueprint to achieving the goal of polio eradication,” said Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar, 2010–11 Chair, The Rotary Foundation. When Rotary initially launched the effort in 1985, 1000 children were

being paralyzed daily by polio across 125 countries each year. Rotary has since contributed more than US \$900 million in that time, and the incidence of polio has fallen by more than 99%.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) is spearheaded by national governments, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF. Since 1988 (the year the GPEI was launched), the incidence of polio has been reduced by more than 99%. In 1988, more than 350,000 children were paralyzed each year in more than 125 endemic countries. In 2009, 1595 children were paralyzed in 24 countries. Only four countries remain endemic: Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

For further information, contact:

Sona Bari, WHO Geneva, Mob: +41 79 475 5511, Email: baris@who.int

For more information please visit www.polioeradication.org.

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