

## **POLIO FACTS AND FIGURES**

### **What is Polio?**

- Polio is the shortened name of poliomyelitis which is the crippling disease caused by the poliovirus. One in 200 cases result in paralysis, which leads to the limbs of the victim becoming limp and disfigured. Among those paralysed, 5-10 percent die when their breathing muscles become immobilized.
- The poliovirus can strike at any age, but affects mainly children under five years of age. It is passed through person-to-person contact, via oral-faecal route. The virus enters the body through the mouth and multiplies in the intestine. Initial symptoms are fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck and pain in the limbs.
- In the parts of India where polio is still endemic, mass immunisation campaigns are being held 8 times a year to break the chain of infection.
- Polio knows no borders and carriers frequently move from one country to another. Therefore, the virus can reappear in previously polio free countries. In 2007 there were cases of polio in 9 African countries although polio is only endemic in one of them.
- We have not had polio in United Kingdom and Ireland for a long time now, yet many people aged 60 and over will remember warnings about the use of swimming pools or swimming in the sea in hot summers and also the pictures of victims in iron lungs.
- There are still polio victims living in our communities – they have stories to tell.
- Polio is only an air flight away from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

### **History of Polio**

- 1954 - Breakthrough by Dr. Jonas Salk with development of first polio vaccine.
- 1961 - Further advances through development of oral vaccine by Dr Albert Sabine. This allowed for administration of vaccine by trained volunteers.
- 1985 - Start of Rotary International's PolioPlus campaign. Some 125 polio-endemic countries with 1,000 children infected every day.
- 1991 - Last case in the Americas.
- 1996 - 85% reduction in cases with 150 countries polio free.
- 2000 - Western Pacific region polio free.
- 2002 - Europe polio free.
- 2003 - Only endemic in 7 countries.
- 2004 - 23 African countries unite to hold multi-national immunisation day.

- 2005/6 - Development of monovalent vaccines.
- 2008 - Only 4 remaining polio endemic countries – Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. Less than 2,000 cases per annum – a 99.4% reduction.
- The final 1% will be the most difficult and the most expensive to eliminate.

## **The progress**

Since Rotary made polio eradication its top priority in 1985 and joined forces with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in 1988:

- Polio cases have fallen from 350,000 a year to 1,315 in 2007
- 125 endemic countries has been reduced to just four; Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan
- Rotary International is the largest private sector contributor to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative
- Rotary members have raised £376 million (\$700 million) to fund polio immunization activities
- Rotary clubs in Great Britain and Ireland have donated £10.5 million (US\$20 million) to polio immunization initiatives
- Two billion children have so far been protected from the disease
- 5 million have been spared from disability
- 250,000 deaths have been averted

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, whose partners include Rotary International, World Health Organization, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, works to:

- Hold national immunization drives for all children under age five in endemic and high risk countries
- Maintain high levels of routine immunization
- Track possible incidences of the disease
- Re-immunize all areas with reported cases
- Improve public health infrastructures worldwide to strengthen the fight against other infectious diseases

## **The challenges**

Challenges faced by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative include:

- Funding
- Political commitment
- Weak infrastructure in developing countries
- War and internal conflict
- Lack of health services
- Difficult-to-reach refugee, migrant, and displaced populations