

Polio Plus Update

by Mark Morse, Chair of our Club's International Avenue of Service
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(Thank you to Mark Morse for providing this Program Summary)

Only one case of polio was reported during the first quarter of 2011 in three of the four countries where polio is still endemic... Afghanistan, India and Nigeria. In the fourth endemic country, Pakistan, however, 26 cases were reported.

All along, in the fight to eradicate polio, there has been an appropriate focus on the countries where polio is still endemic, but at the same time polio fighters have had to deal with periodic re-importation of polio into countries where polio had been eradicated for years. During 2010, for example, a major polio outbreak took place in Tajikistan, but that infestation has since been eliminated. In the first quarter of 2011, 28 polio cases were reported in an outbreak in the Congo and 18 were reported in Chad. Total first quarter 2011 reported polio cases in the entire world was 81.

Rotary established the Polio Plus campaign in 1985 with the goal of immunizing all of the world's children. Rotarians have contributed over \$900 million to Polio Plus since then and more than a million Rotarians have volunteered their time in helping with the eradication efforts. Since 1988, the number of countries where polio is endemic shrunk from 125 to 4, and the number of cases decreased from 350,000 a year to less than 1,000. It is calculated that over these years immunization has prevented 5 million cases of polio paralysis and 250,000 deaths.

The Gates Foundation has pledged \$355 million for Polio Plus, contingent on Rotary raising an additional \$200 million. The deadline for raising Rotary's share is December 2012. Rotary International reports that \$160 million has been raised so far.

(Editor's Note: In addition to providing this Polio Plus update, including a short Rotary International video, Mark made a few remarks on his recent trip to Chicago to attend the Itzhak Perlman "Concert to End Polio". For more on that experience, see the March 7, 2011 Rotary Messenger.)

