

FACT SHEET January 2012

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) works to ensure that no child will ever again suffer the crippling effects of polio. Since its establishment in 1988, the GPEI has reduced the global incidence of polio by 99%. The number of polio-endemic countries has been reduced from 125 to four (Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan).

- Seven million people are walking today as a result of the effort to eradicate polio, and the vast majority of children in the world now live in polio-free areas.
- Eradicating polio will result in estimated savings of US\$ 40 -50 billion, nearly all in developing countries.

Situation

The year 2011 saw a significant decline in the total number of polio cases world-wide (620 as of 3 January 2012), compared to 2010 and 2009. This decline is largely due to the reduction in the number and intensity of polio outbreaks in non-endemic countries, and strong progress in India.

Despite the overall decline, there has been a steep increase in polio cases in 2011 in three of the four polio-endemic countries. As a result, the Independent Monitoring Board of the GPEI considers that the GPEI is not on track to stop wild poliovirus transmission globally by the end of 2012. The rising number of polio cases in Pakistan and Nigeria, and the international spread of the poliovirus from these countries, pose the most imminent threat to global polio eradication.

The increase in cases in key endemic areas constitutes an incontrovertible risk to global polio eradication. If polio eradication fails, within a decade 250,000 children a year will again be paralysed by an entirely preventable disease. In areas with poor immunity, adults will die, as seen recently in Tajikistan, Congo and China.

Action

- The polio eradication programme is now operating on an emergency basis to identify and counter problems faster, to bring a higher level of accountability (in countries and international partners) and to concentrate resources.
- Operations at WHO will be run out of an emergency operations facility, which will serve as the control room for inter-agency support to countries. The CDC Emergency Operations Center has been activated for 18 months. These facilities provides state-of-the-art communications, logistics, staff support, and project tracking.
- The Executive Board of the World Health Organization at their upcoming meeting in January, 2012 will discuss a draft resolution that calls for the completion of polio eradication as a "programmatic emergency for global public health."

- At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Australia at the end of October, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the President of Nigeria made public commitments to provide full support to their polio eradication efforts, address remaining challenges, and stop polio in their countries by the end of 2012.
- Pakistan has revised and strengthened its national emergency plan. The Prime Minister has recently appointed a Special Representative for Polio Eradication in his Office to closely monitor the programme. International partners are strengthening their support to sub-district level government authorities and securing active support from religious and political groups to mobilize communities. The PM has called for greater accountability and stern measures against officials in under-performing areas, which have already resulted in consequences.
- In Nigeria, a new emergency action plan is being revised in January. International polio partners have increased their technical support at the local government area level, particularly in the northern states where polio circulates. The President has formed a "Special Task Force," reporting to him, to address remaining obstacles. State Governors are helping build public demand for vaccination; the Governors' Forum holds quarterly sensitization campaigns in all states in collaboration with civil society groups.
- Despite increasing insecurity in the highest-risk districts of Afghanistan, which makes it difficult to reach children with vaccine, specific initiatives are taking place. The government has begun 'routine' polio vaccination, establishing teams of vaccinators who regularly visit homes to vaccinate children. In accessible areas, using a tactic known as Short Interval Additional Dose, polio vaccine is being given more frequently over a period of time to make the most of an opportunity to reach a child.
- The President of Chad convenes a monthly meeting to review progress in polio eradication and other public health concerns; a six-month emergency plan is being finalized. Stronger technical support from international partners has been deployed through five regional 'hubs' to improve operational effectiveness and speed.
- In DRC, where polio eradication efforts enjoy strong government commitment, polio is largely confined to northern Katanga. Outreach continues with communities in in this area that are refusing vaccine and intense immunization activities are planned for early 2012.

The GPEI is a public-private partnership led by national governments and spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The leading private-sector financial partners of the GPEI are Rotary International and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Over the history of the GPEI – sometimes called the largest peace-time operation in history – 20 million volunteers have been involved in immunizing 2.5 billion children, and private and public sector contributions have totalled over US\$ 8 billion.