

April 10, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

As we prepare to mark World Immunization Week (April 24-30), we are reminded that the incredible progress toward stopping polio is one of the best examples of the power of vaccines. Polio vaccines developed in the 1950s and 60s are now given to children living in every corner of the world. Because of this, we'll soon eradicate a human disease for only the second time in history.

There are several innovative immunization strategies that are proving to be incredibly valuable as we work to reach all children with polio vaccines and get to zero cases:

**Building trust:** The polio program learned early that it would be impossible to vaccinate every last child without the involvement of communities. From mullahs to local health workers, community volunteers have been essential to building trust in the polio program and vaccines. Now, in many places, parents aren't just accepting polio vaccines for their children, they are demanding them and other vaccines for their communities.

Women in particular have become the face of the eradication effort. Their ability to reach children inside the home is a major reason we have been able to make such great strides in dropping the parental refusal rate for the polio vaccine. On International Women's Day on March 8, we recognized amazing women like [Tahera](#), who is one of more than 65,000 dedicated vaccinators working tirelessly to bring vaccines to children in Afghanistan.

**Reaching every child:** To stamp out polio for good, it's not enough to only vaccinate the children living in areas with regular access to health services. We also need to vaccinate the hardest to reach: the children living in areas with faltering health systems, in remote regions, and among migrant populations.

The program has implemented a number of strategies to ensure none of these children are missed. Detailed microplans of every community—including migrant groups and refugee camps—are used to identify immunization gaps and areas of highest need. In some remote areas, health workers set up mobile health clinics to deliver polio vaccines along with other essential health services, like vitamin A supplements. Vaccination booths at cross-border transit points, bus and train stations, and toll plazas allow vaccinators to reach children on the move.

We saw this dedication to reaching every child during the [synchronized immunization campaigns](#) that took place at the end of March across 13 countries in West and Central Africa. Traveling by foot or bicycle, health workers worked up to 12 hours a day to reach a staggering 116 million children. Frontline workers' unwavering commitment to protecting all children, along with the program's innovative strategies, are driving us closer to a polio-free world.

**Innovating to improve vaccine delivery and maintain a polio-free world:** As we continue implementing innovative delivery strategies with our existing polio vaccines, the program is also leading the way in



Women vaccinators like Tahera, pictured here, are working tirelessly to deliver the polio vaccine to children in Afghanistan. (source: WHO Afghanistan)

research and development for new vaccines that will help the program overcome remaining challenges and keep the world polio-free. This includes:

- *New polio vaccines:*
  - *Sabin Inactivated Polio Vaccine (sIPV):* Vaccine manufacturers are currently developing a safer way to produce inactivated polio vaccine with less-virulent Sabin strains. To date, two manufacturers have licensed Sabin IPV products domestically, and others are working toward licensure. Expanding manufacturing capacity is critical for assuring an affordable IPV supply for the future.
  - *Virus-like particles (VLP):* United Kingdom investigators have produced a stable IPV using VLPs, which eliminate the need for live wild or OPV polioviruses for vaccine production, and reduce the risk of a breach of containment from a vaccine manufacturer in the post eradication era.
  
- *Alternative delivery methods:* Microarray patches may revolutionize how IPV is delivered, particularly in hard-to-reach communities. These stamp-sized patches are applied directly to the skin for a minimal amount of time (e.g., five minutes), delivering vaccines without a needle and syringe, while requiring little training to administer.

During World Immunization Week, I encourage you all to reflect on just how much we've achieved by aiming to reach every child with polio vaccines. This journey is not yet over and there is more work to be done – but we should be proud that we've shown the world what we can accomplish together.

Thank you,

Chris Elias  
President, Global Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Chairman, Polio Oversight Board