

From the field

Since the launch of the global polio eradication initiative in 1988, some 5 million people have been spared paralysis because they were immunized. During that time, the fight against polio has seen countless successes and challenges throughout the world.

Thanks to Rotarian contributions of more than \$500 million, Rotary and its partners in the polio eradication effort have successfully interrupted wild poliovirus transmission in all but six countries. Africa alone accounts for nearly 90 percent of the remaining global polio burden, with West and Central Africa at greatest risk. Cross-border importation remains a major concern in these regions — and as long as a single child remains infected with poliovirus, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease.

With this in mind, 22 West African nations agreed in late July to synchronize immunization activities and work together to curb an outbreak that originated in northern Nigeria's badly affected Kano state last year. Mass immunization campaigns began in October and will continue through November, with a goal of reaching 74 million children.

Here's a look at activities in the world's six remaining polio-endemic countries.

Afghanistan

Just three cases have been confirmed in Afghanistan this year. To guarantee continuing success, mop-up campaigns are planned in the country's southern region, where security concerns remain a challenge to adequate immunization coverage.

Egypt

By mid-year, Egypt had experienced only one case of wild poliovirus. The country held two National Immunization Days (NIDs) and one Subnational Immunization Day (SNID) in 2004 and has implemented house-to-house mop-ups to ensure that transmission is interrupted.

India

Thanks to volunteers like Rotarians Monica Arora and Asha Handa, the number of confirmed cases in India in 2004 stands at less than one-fifth of the 2003 total. The 40 cases confirmed this year mark a dramatic turnaround since 2002, when an outbreak infected some 1,600 children. With current



JEAN-MARC GIBOUX

immunization efforts focused on the high-risk areas of northern India, particularly Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states, the country is on track to interrupt transmission soon.

Niger

After cases increased more than tenfold from 2002 to 2003, Niger stepped up immunization activities and added more NIDs. Still, transmission persists. Near mid-year, 19 cases had been reported. In an effort to stem the spread, the country is conducting three NIDs during the second half of 2004.

Nigeria

With 491 cases as of 1 September 2004, Nigeria accounts for nearly 80 percent of the total number of cases reported globally this year. An 11-month suspension of activities in Kano state, from August 2003 to July 2004, dealt a major blow to immunization efforts nationwide.

On 31 July 2004, Kano state kicked off a five-day series of SNIDs. The events, attended by immediate Past RI President Jonathan Majiyagbe, signaled an end to the 11-month boycott and marked the beginning of an aggressive campaign to roll back the epidemic. Rotarians will play a major role, participating in multiple SNIDs and NIDs and serving as independent monitors for ongoing efforts in Kano state's high-risk areas.

Although efforts to contain the outbreak that began in Kano state in 2003 are

well underway, importation from Nigeria continues to pose a threat to children across the continent. Of the 11 African countries outside Nigeria reporting polio cases in 2004, 10 were reinfected by a virus shown to come from Nigeria. Countries in West and Central Africa, such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Côte d'Ivoire, are at greatest risk, but poliovirus genetically linked to the northern Nigerian virus also has been responsible for cases in Botswana, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan's Darfur region in 2004.

Pakistan

At mid-year, Pakistan had only 23 confirmed cases — less than half the number reported during the same period in 2003.

All statistics valid as of 1 September 2004.



JEAN-MARC GIBOUX

ABOVE: A 2002 NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION DAY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

BELOW: A CHILD RECOVERS FROM RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY IN DELHI AFTER A BOUT WITH POLIO.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ARORA AND HANDA ADMINISTER VACCINE NEAR A LOCAL HEALTH CLINIC IN GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH STATE. OBSERVING, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: TWO CLINIC REPRESENTATIVES; ROTARIANS ASHOK BAJAJ, ASHOK KANTOOR, AND AJEET NIGAM; AND AN ONLOOKER.