

Rotary International: A Hands-On Effort to Eradicate Polio



Grant Summary

Grantee: The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International

Amount: \$355,120,000

Purpose: To support global polio eradication activities through the Rotary Foundation's PolioPlus program

Regions Served: Nigeria, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan

Location: United States

◀ Rotary members help administer the oral polio vaccine (OPV) on National Immunization Day, Moradabad, India.

Polio is history throughout much of the world—a distant memory for some, a photo in a textbook for others. For more than 20 years, Rotary International, a global humanitarian service organization, has played a major role in the fight to end polio worldwide, contributing more than \$800 million to the effort through its PolioPlus program. Rotary's involvement is also highly personal, with thousands of members volunteering to reach the world's children with the oral polio vaccine (OPV). To date, Rotary members have helped immunize more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.

“The world would not be where it is without Rotary, and it won't get where it needs to go without Rotary.”

Bill Gates
Co-chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

A Leader in Polio Eradication Efforts

Rotary became involved with polio in 1979, when the organization committed to immunize 6 million children in the Philippines through a Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) grant from The Rotary Foundation. Encouraged by the program's success, Rotary consulted with Dr. Albert S. Sabin, developer of the OPV, and launched the PolioPlus program in 1985.

Focus on the Goal

When Rotary started the PolioPlus program, more than 350,000 children worldwide were infected annually by this crippling and sometimes fatal disease. In 2008, fewer than 2,000 children were infected, a reduction of more than 99 percent. Eradication clearly is within reach—but polio remains a threat until the day the world is certified polio-free.

Today, the wild poliovirus persists in only four countries: India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Afghanistan. However, eradicating polio requires more than just eliminating the disease in these core countries. Children worldwide must be continually protected from outbreaks caused by imported cases. Rotary and its partners in the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#) ([World Health Organization](#), the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and [UNICEF](#)) use four key strategies to help nations become—and remain—polio-free:

- **Routine immunization**

Each child must receive four doses of the oral vaccine during the first year of life if countries at risk for imported cases are to remain polio-free.

- **National Immunization Days**

For decades, Rotary and its partners have organized and implemented National Immunization Day events throughout the world. Rotary members visit villages and towns to distribute vaccine supplies to local health centers, educate the community about disease prevention and the importance of vaccinations, and work with local officials to ensure that the vaccine reaches every child.

- **Surveillance**

Rotary members play a vital role as they volunteer alongside health workers, pediatricians, and others to find, report, and investigate reports of polio symptoms, ideally within 48 hours of onset.

- **Targeted mop-up campaigns**

Rotary members join health workers in door-to-door community outreach in areas where recent outbreaks have been reported.

Champions of Fundraising

Over the years, Rotary members have raised funds in some very creative ways. In 2008, for example, more than 200 Swiss Rotary clubs pooled efforts to designate Sept. 13 as Swiss National Polio Day. Some 13,000 Rotary members worked with local political leaders and regional health officials to set up brightly colored booths on sidewalks and public squares in cities and villages across the nation. Rotary volunteers sold small packets of sunflower seeds for 75 rappen (about 64 cents), about the cost of the six doses of vaccine necessary to protect a child for life. Each packet carried the slogan, "With only 75 rappen you are in!" to demonstrate how even the smallest contributions can make a difference. The one-day event raised \$643,000.

Rotary also benefits from outside grants, including recent contributions totaling \$355 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Foundation Co-chair Bill Gates announced the latest grant during his [speech at the Rotary leadership conference](#) in January 2009. Rotary in turn pledged to raise \$200 million in matching funds within three years.

"We are making this grant and asking you to raise a total of \$200 million by June 30, 2012, because we know eradication doesn't come in an instant," Gates said. "If we all have the fortitude to see this effort through to the end, then we will eradicate polio."

To learn more about Rotary International's PolioPlus program, including how you can help, visit [Rotary International's End Polio Now web site](#).

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