



Polio News

Eradication

Issue 4 – June 1999

House-to-House Campaigns
Page 2

NID Calendar
Page 3

Countries in Conflict
Page 5

A Newsletter for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative
Expanded Programme on Immunization
Department of Vaccines and Other Biologicals
World Health Organization

Unanimous support at Assembly for final assault on polio

Countries set aside political and territorial differences for eradication effort

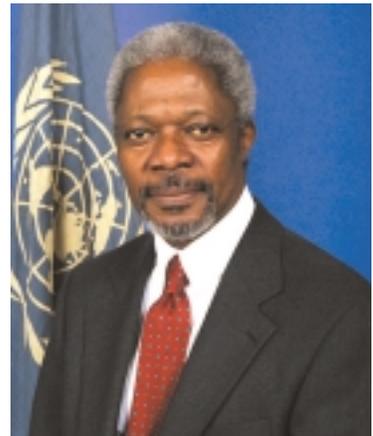
THE resolution urging all member states to accelerate the initiative to eradicate polio by the end of the year 2000 was unanimously passed at the World Health Assembly (24 May). Forty-six countries spoke from the floor to pledge their commitment to meet the target. All speakers agreed that the funding shortfall and civil strife were now the main hurdles.

Argentina, Brazil and Cuba – veterans of polio campaigns in the Americas – volunteered to help the remaining endemic countries of Asia and Africa.

Countries bordering areas affected by conflict backed WHO's efforts to negotiate truces in Afghanistan, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo through the UN. The resolution urged member states to "support the peace-building process by facilitating ceasefires for national immunization days". There was unanimous support for WHO's proposal to contain all laboratory stocks of the poliovirus. The EU said it would spearhead containment and certification activities in its member states.

At an extraordinary meeting called earlier in the week by WHO Director-General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, governments of key endemic and donor countries agreed on an acceleration plan for the 'home stretch'. At that meeting, the US Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr Donna Shalala called on Dr Brundtland to "drop the 'Director' from your title and become the 'General' for the final assault". Rotary International immediately offered its 1.4 million volunteers as "foot soldiers" in this campaign.

Accepting the challenge, Dr Brundtland said: "Poliovirus is now on the verge of extinction. We have travelled farther and faster than many would have predicted. But one of the paradoxes of an eradication initiative is that control efforts must be intensified as the disease disappears." ♦



Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, has agreed to negotiate truces for immunization in countries affected by conflict



Mother Theresa, one of the foremost advocates of child health, seen here administering polio vaccine to children in India

India reaffirms commitment to year 2000 target

STILL the single biggest reservoir of poliovirus, India has announced a fast-track approach to meet the year 2000 target.

On the day the WHA resolution on polio was passed in Geneva (24 May), the Indian delegation shared its ambitious plan for National Immunization

Days and said that all 130 million children under the age of five will be vaccinated four times between October 1999 and January 2000. Two extra rounds in the Spring of 2000 will cover the highest risk areas. ♦



Pakistan: world's largest ever house-to-house mop-up

WHO and health officials launched a massive house-to-house immunization campaign in Pakistan's Sindh Province in the middle of April. The largest mopping-up operation ever conducted, it reached a record 6.5 million children in this high-risk area.

For five days from April 15-19, thousands of provincial health authority staff and district health workers travelled from house to house to find and vaccinate children under the age of five. They marked with chalk the doors of houses where the vaccine was delivered so that supervisors could quickly verify that every house had been visited.

"We have to corner the virus and a precise operation like this is needed to knock polio out," said Dr Rehan, National Programme Manager, EPI, Pakistan.

"We have made great progress. This is the first polio vaccine many children in Pakistan have ever received."

The collaborative effort of the government of Pakistan, WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and other partners reached an estimated ten percent more

children than the country's last and most successful NIDs. The campaigns were publicised through local newspapers and radio, and at mosques

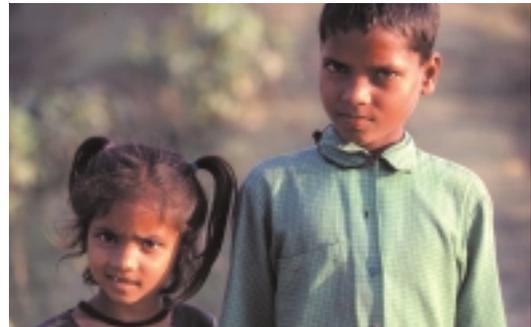
Mop-ups were also carried out in Baluchistan, and in North West Frontier Province where vitamin A was included.

Mopping-up campaigns are now a major focus for the 'home stretch' of polio eradication, particularly for high-risk areas in countries which are 'global reservoirs' of poliovirus. Vaccine is delivered from house to house in two rounds, one month apart.

Health authorities in Pakistan expect that, combined with improvements to the routine vaccination programme, they will significantly boost the protection of children against all vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles and tetanus, over the next 18 months. Routine immunization and six years of National Immunization Days have dramatically reduced disease prevalence in Pakistan, but still almost seven percent of the world's reported polio cases occurred in Pakistan last year. Over half of these were in Sindh. ♦

Stop teams boost surveillance in Nepal

A'STOP' team of surveillance officers, deployed to Nepal at the beginning of this year, has made significant progress in improving AFP surveillance. Large numbers of district and hospital staff have been trained. In three regions, which border India, with low surveillance and high populations, more than twice as many AFP cases were soon being reported to public health officers.



Good surveillance is key to the success of polio eradication – and to the health of future generations
Photo ©WHO/PH. Schiller



Delivering vaccines to remote areas in Nepal

Photo ©WHO/PH. Schiller

STOP (Stop Transmission of Polio) teams are the brainchild of "old smallpox warriors", who were recruited – mainly from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) – to help stop transmission of smallpox in the final phase of eradication.

Together with WHO and Ministries of Health, CDC has selected, trained and deployed 56 health professionals to help with intensified surveillance and immunization activities in endemic countries. Every three months, CDC and WHO will train 30 new officers. Teams can be requested by contacting either agency. ♦

NID calendar: May to October 1999

National Immunization Days and other supplementary OPV immunization activities

This calendar reflects information known to WHO/HQ at the time of print. Some NID dates are preliminary and may change; please contact WHO/HQ for up-to-date information.

Month of 1st round	Country	Type of Activity	Date 1st round	Date 2nd round	Date 3rd round
MAY	Turkey	NIDs	26 April-2 May-99	31 May-6 June-99	
	Afghanistan	NIDs	9-12 May-99	13-15 June-99	
JUNE	Angola	NIDs	12-13 June-99	17-18 July-99	21-22 August
JULY	Zambia	SNIDs	23-24 July-99	20-21 Aug-99	
	Mozambique	NIDs	26-30 July-99	30 Aug-3 Sept-99	
AUGUST	Rwanda	NIDs	August-99	September-99	
	DR Congo	NIDs	13-15 Aug-99	17-19 Sept-99	22-24 Oct-99
	Tanzania	SNIDs	7-8 Aug-99	11-12 Sept-99	
	Uganda	NIDs	7-8 Aug-99	25-26 Sept-99	
SEPTEMBER	Togo	Mop-up	September-99	October-99	
OCTOBER	Afghanistan	SNIDs	1 October-99	1 November-99	
	Egypt	Mop-up	1 September-99	1 October-99	

News and Announcements



IHT publishes polio

THE International Herald Tribune published a joint opinion editorial by Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland and Ms Carol Bellamy, urging the world to “Surmount the doubts and rid the world of polio”.

The op-ed drew parallels with smallpox eradication. “Faced with the possibility of not meeting the target, Indira Gandhi appealed to her country’s national pride,” the article said. “They said it could be done and it was. Within 12 months, smallpox was gone from India.” ♦

News and announcements contd



Second anniversary of last case in Western Pacific

THE second anniversary of the last case of polio in the Western Pacific region was a significant landmark in polio eradication. The last case – a 15-month-old girl called Mum Chanty – was found in Cambodia on 19 March 1997 in a houseboat on the Mekong River system. Since then, there has been no trace of wild poliovirus in the most populous WHO region which includes China.

“The polio eradication effort has shown how countries can fight a disease when they have clear guidelines and strong political will, but we cannot drop our guard yet,” said Julian Bilous of the polio/EPI team of the WHO Regional Office of the Western Pacific, at a press conference in Manila on the anniversary of the last case. The Regional Certification Commission will only certify the region polio-free after a minimum of three years. ♦

Timely surveillance

FORTY-FIVE motorcycles will help accelerate surveillance activities in Uganda.

With financial support from DFID and WHO, Uganda now has trained surveillance officers equipped with motorcycles in every district, as well as four-wheel drive vehicles for the laboratory and UNEPI. ♦



Polio eradication partners

DFID

The UK Government's Department for International Development has pledged a voluntary contribution of £500,000 for polio eradication through the Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals cluster at WHO Geneva. DFID has also temporarily seconded a technical officer to Geneva to assist with surveillance activities.

Millennium Fund

The Millennium Fund held a board meeting in Geneva for the first time and restated its commitment to support the global polio eradication initiative in the final stretch. The Fund has pledged to raise funds for polio eradication through its global lottery Millions2000. Tickets

are available through the internet: www.millions2000.com or telephone +800 2424 2000.

Rotary International

At the 12 - 17 April meeting, Trustees of the Rotary International Foundation approved a total of US \$6,139,000 in grants to the Polio Eradication Initiative, primarily through the WHO Regional Offices for AFRO, EMRO, SEARO and WPRO, for immunization and surveillance activities.

UN Foundation

On 11 May, the United Nations Foundation Board unanimously agreed that UNF should become a partner in the

WHO/UNICEF polio eradication initiative. UNF will work closely with other partners to help raise the substantial funds needed to eradicate polio.

World Bank

The World Bank and the Government of India have reprogrammed US \$48 million in existing World Bank loans to India. The funds will be used to facilitate purchase of OPV and assist with operational costs for the intensified four rounds of NIDs planned for October 1999 - January 2000 (see front page). ♦

Reaching the unreached in Afghanistan

HUNDREDS of thousands of men and women took their children to health posts during Afghanistan's first round of National Immunization Days on 9 May. An estimated 4.3 million children were vaccinated against polio and given vitamin A supplements.

With cooperation from the ruling Taliban, vaccines were delivered across front lines to areas which have been battlegrounds for years – although a formal ceasefire was not secured.

Around 20 000 health workers and volunteers were trained and deployed to reach children in remote areas. OPV posts were set up in mosques, madrasas, health posts and private houses, with easy access. WHO helicoptered supplies and supervisors in to three villages of the remote district of Badakshan. Using snow to keep vaccine cool, volunteers will stay to carry out the next round, planned for June. They will make the seven-day journey back on horseback.

"We mounted a strong, well coordinated social mobilization campaign through local radio, mosques, the BBC, Voice of America and print media in Afghanistan and Pakistan," said Dr Mohammed Abdi Jama, WHO representative for Afghanistan.



Delivering vaccines in Afghanistan's mountainous terrain

Photo ©WHO

The NIDs are a joint initiative by WHO, UNICEF, the Ministry of Public Health and NGOs.

The UN appealed to the ruling Taliban and the opposition Northern Alliance to observe a truce for polio vaccination. Fighting ceased in all but two provinces. The Taliban and opposition leaders have given assurances that they will observe a three-day truce for the next round in June.

Mass immunization campaigns and NIDs have been conducted in Afghanistan since 1994. ♦

Mopping up in Northern Iraq



Many children received polio vaccine for the first time in Iraq

AN estimated 500 000 children in the remote and troubled Northern Governorates of Iraq were delivered polio vaccine – many for the first time – in a house-to-house campaign during National Immunization Days in March.

Inauguration ceremonies in Erbil and Sulimaniyah were attended by high-level political leaders. International supervision was kept to a minimum in some areas in the mountains

because of insecurity there; the number of local authority supervisory teams was increased.

Health authorities in the three governorates worked with vaccination teams to ensure they reached children in every village, including those in insecure areas bordering south-east Turkey.

AFP surveillance has improved substantially: 12 out of a minimum target of 14 AFP cases have already been detected in 1999.

Previous efforts to immunize children in the Northern Governorates have been frustrated by regional tensions and fighting. ♦

Vaccine and Vit A for Mozambique's children

MOZAMBICAN Health Minister Aurelio Zilhao has announced a programme to vaccinate more than 3 million children under the age of five against polio. Children will also be given vitamin A as widespread deficiency has been reported in Mozambique. Two rounds will be conducted from 26-30 July and 30 August-3 September 1999. ♦

Polio Eradication Strategies

Polio outbreak in Angola

ANGOLA'S massive polio outbreak has cautioned the world against failing to vaccinate children, and given new impetus to negotiations between Angola's warring parties to hold fire for polio vaccination.

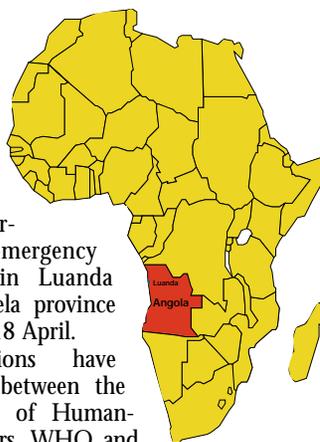
Nearly 900 cases of polio have occurred in one of the largest polio outbreaks ever recorded in Africa. To date, 58 children have died. The outbreak was sparked by last year's renewed fighting which displaced families to overcrowded slums in the capital Luanda. Almost all cases were children under five who had not been adequately vaccinated; 60 per cent have never been immunized because of the conflict.

The Government of Angola acted quickly to control the epidemic with an emergency vaccination campaign, and brought forward three rounds of National Immunization Days, now scheduled for June, July and August. Working with WHO and UNICEF, the Ministry of Health vaccinated more than 900 000

children during the emergency campaign in Luanda and Benguela province on 17 and 18 April.

Discussions have intensified between the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, WHO and UNICEF on how to reach children in areas controlled by opposition party UNITA.

To help focus international attention on the tragedy of this epidemic, Lord Snowdon, the well-known British photographer, travelled to Angola as a WHO Special Envoy in May to record the outbreak and vaccination campaign there. The Saturday Telegraph, a leading British newspaper, will feature the photographs in a July cover story about polio in Angola. ♦



Côte d'Ivoire: 'standard bearer' for West Africa



Dr Brundtland at opening ceremony of NIDs in Côte d'Ivoire.
Photo ©WHO/M. Crozet

AT the opening ceremony on 23 April of National Immunization Days in Côte d'Ivoire, WHO Director-General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland administered polio vaccine and vitamin A supplements to children. In an address to the ceremony, hosted by President Bedie, she said: "Today we look to Côte d'Ivoire to lead the eradication effort in this corner of the world.

"It will set a gold standard for surrounding countries. Success here will mean success for the whole region."

Last year, 37 cases of polio were reported in Côte d'Ivoire, although many more went unreported, and thousands more children must have been infected with poliovirus. ♦



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