

NOW, MORE THAN EVER: STOP POLIO FOREVER.



**Statement Global Polio Eradication Initiative/4
03 August 2004**

GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE WELCOMES IMMUNIZATION CAMPAIGN IN KANO, NIGERIA

Geneva - The spearheading partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative welcome the resumption of polio immunization campaigns in Kano, Nigeria. The Initiative re-affirms its commitment to support Kano's state, traditional and religious leaders, as well as Nigeria's federal ministry of health to ensure the country reaches its goal of stopping poliovirus transmission by end 2004.

Kano's decision to vaccinate children against polio comes at a critical time in the polio eradication programme. Sub-Saharan Africa is on the verge of the largest polio epidemic in recent history. Cases recorded in the region are five times that for the same period in 2003 (483 compared to 95), due to the outbreak originating from Kano and surrounding states.

The resumption of immunization activities in Kano, the first round of which began on 31 July and ends today, is one of several measures needed to stop polio transmission in Nigeria and to halt the international spread of the virus. Thirty of 37 states in Nigeria are infected. High quality campaigns across the country and particularly in Kano and surrounding states during National Immunization Days from September to November will be central to broader efforts to prevent the further spread of polio. Key to success will be rebuilding community confidence in the safety of oral polio vaccine to ensure all children are reached.

On 30 June 2004, WHO reinforced that all international travelers to Nigeria protect themselves by being up-to-date with vaccination against poliomyelitis as outlined in WHO's *International Travel and Health*. WHO has also undertaken a consultative process with experts to evaluate additional measures that might be required to prevent the further international spread of wild poliovirus to polio-free countries and areas in the future.

Notes to journalists:

As of 3 August 2004, Nigeria has reported 430 cases of polio and poses the highest risk to the end-2004 target for the global eradication of polio.

Polio immunization campaigns were suspended in various northern states, including Kano in August 2003, following concerns by public figures regarding the safety of oral polio vaccine (OPV).

The poliovirus is now endemic in only six countries, down from over 125 when the Global Polio Eradication Initiative was launched in 1988. The six countries with indigenous wild poliovirus are: Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Niger, Afghanistan and Egypt.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

The polio eradication coalition includes governments of countries affected by polio; private sector foundations (e.g. United Nations Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); development banks (e.g. the World Bank); donor governments (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America); the European Commission; humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations (e.g. the International Red Cross and Red Crescent societies) and corporate partners (e.g. Aventis Pasteur, De Beers, Wyeth). Volunteers in developing countries also play a key role; 20 million have participated in mass immunization campaigns.

For further information, please contact: Melissa Corkum, WHO/Geneva, tel. +41 22 791 2765, corkumm@who.int; Vivian Fiore, Rotary Int'l/Chicago, tel. +1 847 866 3234, fiorev@rotaryintl.org; Steve Stewart, CDC/Atlanta, tel. +1 404 639 8327, znc4@cdc.gov; Claire Hajaj, UNICEF/New York, tel. +1 212 326-7566, chajaj@unicef.org