

# Leading the Fight Against Polio

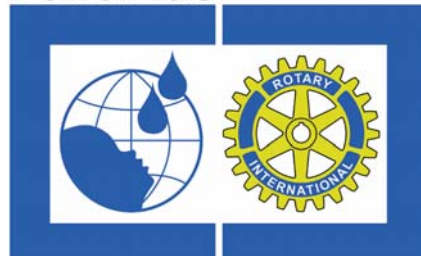
Dear Rotary Leaders,

In today's global village, poliovirus can easily be imported into a polio-free region, country, and continent that can spread rapidly amongst populations who are not immunized. Despite the progress achieved since 1988, as long as a single child remains infected with poliovirus, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease. The virus by nature does not recognize race, class, gender or even borders and is capable of re-infecting polio-free countries, new population, and anyone vulnerable.

In 2006 and even last year, there were cases of importation in Polio-free countries, since the virus does not require a passport or visa, it travelled as far as Africa from the Polio endemic countries re-infecting nations that had long forgotten the scars of Polio. Their population found threatened because of these importations. Further the survival of Polio virus in India and subsequent importation to Polio-free States as well as to other countries does not reflect well on India's image while sitting amongst developed nations. Today by stressing on such instances, I wish to communicate to you the urgency of eradicating Polio once and for all .

Once a wild Polio virus penetrates into a Polio free location it will spread like a wild fire amongst vulnerable populations and poor countries where children are left unimmunized. The efforts undertaken for the past 23 years in interrupting transmission in these Polio-free regions stand to lose all that it has gained, often leading to a state when much of the resources to strengthen efforts in endemic nations will have to be compromised for attending to these challenges. As

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it is the current funding gaps in the global campaign needs to be bridged to contain virus in endemic nations and prevent importation in vulnerable populations and countries. We cannot afford such situations, especially when the virus in its last stage is acquiring better ways. We have, so much to do to protect each and every child from the crippling effects of Polio.

However having said that, efforts and struggle of eradicating the virus from India have been long discussed in every possible Meet of Rotary. If the world is to interrupt Polio virus transmission, India has to eliminate the virus, and for India to achieve this, Polio reservoirs like U.P and Bihar have to eradicate the virus. India is best suited to achieve this with the kind of strategy that's under play, the commitment of Partners particularly the Government and the motivation and support of individuals at all levels. Nowhere in the world, is the battle to eliminate Polio as strong and vigorous as in India.

Today, India has already reported more than 400 cases of wild Poliovirus (reported mainly in and around U.P and Bihar). India has made steady progress against the virus especially the P1 virus but the emergence of P1 cases in U.P is a matter of concern. Today, more than 95% of the regions

in the country remain Polio free. Only Uttar Pradesh and Bihar till date remain endemic to poliovirus. With ongoing extensive efforts to combat Polio in India, our National PolioPlus Committee is optimistic about overcoming these remaining gaps in UP and Bihar.

Polio battle is now at its heights in India and the upcoming months are very crucial particularly when States such as Bihar is struggling with the tragedy of one of the worst floods in recent times. I urge you to educate, promote, motivate and participate in every possible way in the coming immunization activities and ensure that not a single child remains without the Polio drops. Remember friends, a promise is a promise and must be honoured, come what may. We promised children of the world of a Polio-free life, today and in the coming months, we must and we shall honour this promise. We cannot falter now or ever particularly when the victory so much closer.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate Rotary's commitment to eradicating Polio from India and the world. Still, as Indians the onus is on us to lead the way in eradicating this virus from the country and subsequently from the world before we endanger other Polio-free states and countries through importation. I believe as Rotary leaders today, this is your chance to honour the promise Rotary made almost 25 years ago.



*Ashok Mahajan  
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