



# The Final Push Toward Polio Eradication

**U.S. leadership has been critical to bringing polio to the verge of global extinction. The next administration and Congress have an important role to play in championing polio eradication.**

## **The U.S. is a major leader in the fight to eradicate polio:**

- The U.S., through CDC and USAID, has provided more than \$1.4 billion in the fight against polio, and is the largest donor to the polio eradication effort.
- The U.S. contributed \$130 million to the eradication effort in 2008 alone.
- Among many other contributions, the CDC is the premier technical expert within the global polio eradication initiative on issues related to disease identification and surveillance at global, regional and national levels.
- Polio eradication is a great example of global partnership and cooperation. The U.S. has worked closely with public and private partners, including the U.K., Rotary International, and more than 25 donor countries to bring this deadly and crippling disease to the brink of eradication.

## **The global fight to eradicate polio is saving the lives of children around the globe:**

- This once-common disease, which affected children throughout the world, has now been eliminated from most parts of the globe, remaining endemic in only four countries, and with a small number of cases reported in an additional handful of countries.
- A recent study in *The Lancet* concluded that eradicating polio is highly cost-effective. The authors showed that the costs of controlling outbreaks in isolated regions are far greater than those associated with eradication, and urge donors to invest the needed funds to support eradication upfront.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 1998, the number of cases of polio worldwide has dropped more than 99%.<sup>2</sup>
- In April 2007, despite ongoing insecurity and political unrest, Afghanistan and Pakistan were able to vaccinate more than 40 million children against polio.<sup>3</sup>

## **The next administration and Congress can help keep the world on track toward polio eradication, and prevent further spread and future outbreaks by:**

- **Committing to filling the existing funding gap.** By increasing U.S. contributions to the effort, and working with partners to close this funding gap, the U.S. can continue to play a critical leading role in the global campaign to eradicate polio. In 2008, U.S. contributions to polio

<sup>1</sup> Thompson, K. and Duintjer Tebbens, R. "Eradication versus control for poliomyelitis: an economic analysis", *The Lancet*, Volume 369: 9570, 21-27 April 2007, Pages 1363-1371.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.polioeradication.org/factsheets.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.polioeradication.org/content/general/LatestNews200704.asp#LANC>



eradication were \$98 million through the CDC and \$31 million via USAID. In 2009 and the years ahead, the U.S. should match or exceed its 2008 contribution to the global polio eradication effort.

- **Encouraging G-8 countries to fulfill their funding pledges for the fight against polio.** The U.S. has been a leader in the fight against polio. While other G8 governments have made strong commitments to polio, not all countries have lived up to their pledges. The voice of the U.S. can be a powerful tool in ensuring that other donors live up to their commitments to fight polio.
- **Renewing efforts to stamp out polio in the remaining four endemic countries – Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan – and preventing its spread across countries’ borders.** Children in these endemic countries continue to suffer and die from the disease, and global progress toward eradication could slow if the disease is not isolated and contained.
  - **Afghanistan:** The ongoing conflict continues to impede progress towards eradication. Insecurity prevents vaccinators from accessing certain parts of the country, resulting in low rates of coverage and pockets of persistent infection. Further, the violence increases the risk of re-infection for polio-free areas of the country as citizens migrate to more stable regions. Overcoming this challenge will require the highest levels of diplomacy. The U.S. can work with the United Nations, NATO and others to implement “Days of Tranquility” that allow vaccinators access to formerly insecure areas of the country, encourage cooperation with Pakistan on joint immunization days to increase coverage rates among migrating populations and work with media to raise awareness about the importance of getting vaccinated.
  - **India:** There is public fatigue and an absence of media interest and attention in polio, and a feeling among some that too much funding is going to a problem with few victims. Political will at the highest levels of the Indian government is necessary to overcome this fatigue. The US can push the government to employ new approaches and maintain its full funding and support for vaccination activities, and work with media & civil society organizations in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to educate citizens about the importance of continuing to participate in eradication activities.
  - **Nigeria:** The key northern states of Kano, Katsina & Zamfara have had persistently low vaccination coverage rates. The U.S can advocate to the President of Nigeria to publicly highlight polio eradication as a national priority, to ensure that leaders at all levels of government are held accountable for improving the quality of immunization activities and to provide a sustainable level of domestic financial resources for polio eradication activities. Advocacy can also be directed to the governors from Kano, Katsina & Zamfara states to heighten the urgency and motivation for improving vaccination campaigns. Lastly, the US can engage media and key religious figures in northern states to raise awareness about the importance of vaccination.
  - **Pakistan:** Civil instability and warfare continues to impede progress towards eradication. Insecurity prevents vaccinators from accessing certain parts of the country, resulting in low rates of coverage and pockets of persistent infection. Further, the violence increases the risk of re-infection for polio-free areas of the country as citizens migrate to more stable regions. Recent outbreaks in provinces that were formerly polio-free have led citizens to question the efficacy of vaccinations more broadly. Overcoming this challenge will require the highest levels of diplomacy. The U.S. can work with the government, United Nations, NATO and others to implement “Days of Tranquility” that allow vaccinators access to formerly insecure areas of the country, encourage



cooperation with Afghanistan on joint immunization days to increase coverage rates among migrating populations and work with media to combat fears about the safety of vaccination.



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## Frequently Asked Questions

Eradicating polio will ensure that future generations of children are protected from this deadly and crippling disease. Through huge efforts and many years of work by dedicated partners, the world is now on the edge of eradicating polio. Taking the final steps now will also protect the billions of dollars that have already been invested in the eradication effort.

By 1999, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative had reduced annual polio cases by 99% and proven that eradication is possible. By 2002, the feasibility of eradication was reaffirmed by certification of eradication of all three wild poliovirus types in three of the six World Health Organization regions. However, in 2003, limited cutbacks in eradication activities led to a resurgence of polio – this means that our efforts have a real impact, shown by the amazing reduction in cases to 2002. But it also shows that a reduction in funding can mean resurgence. It is essential for leaders like the U.S. to continue investing in eradication if we are to erase this disease.

### **What about recent setbacks in polio eradication?**

There have been localized setbacks in polio eradication, mostly the import of new cases into countries that border one of the four endemic countries. Most often, these are countries with health systems in crisis. There is good news here too, though: where new cases of polio have emerged, eradication efforts have limited and stopped an outbreak in more than 75% of instances, which shows that the global response is working and is agile enough to respond to setbacks. However, these setbacks can damage the ongoing effort to eradicate polio; continued U.S. leadership is key to minimizing and isolating outbreaks.

### **What about the countries where polio is endemic? Are they doing anything to help?**

The heads of state of the four remaining endemic countries are engaged, to varying degrees, on polio eradication. In two of the four countries, the impact of this support is already evident in new pledges totaling \$311 million in domestic financing for polio activities. Commitment at the highest levels of government is essential to ensure effective management of immunization campaigns.

### **Who else is providing funding to fight polio?**

Some of the major partners in this effort include fellow G-8 donor governments, such as Germany, the U.K., and Canada. In addition, Rotary International has raised more than \$650 million to date for eradication efforts.