

## News Release Templates

### News Feature Article

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*Newspapers and magazines are often interested in a story like global polio eradication, but due to time and staff constraints, they may be unable to assign a reporter. A pre-written feature article, such as the one below, is an ideal solution for this situation.*

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#### **Polio: The end is near**

During the first half of the 20th century, poliomyelitis paralyzed half a million persons a year. Today the disease is on the verge of eradication.

The war against polio has been waged on many fronts for decades, and never has victory been so close. It is a battle that is fought with two tiny drops of vaccine, sophisticated technology and an army of dedicated volunteers who help scientists track an elusive foe.

The struggle to achieve global polio eradication is a public health story of epic proportions. Rotary International is the volunteer arm of a global partnership dedicated to eradicating polio. Public partners include the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and national governments around the world. Rotary's role on this team has been labeled a model for public-private partnerships for years to come.

Rotary members are leading the charge by committing nearly a half billion US dollars in private funds through 2005 to provide polio vaccine, technical support, medical personnel, laboratory equipment and educational materials for health workers and parents.

But even more important, Rotary members offer their compassion, time and expertise. During national immunization days (NIDs), Rotarians volunteer to help at immunization posts, deliver vaccine, transport health workers and recruit fellow volunteers. The following are some examples of Rotary in action:

- Since 1996, in India, more than 100,000 Rotarians and their families have joined the Indian government in immunizing more than 125 million children on a single day, signaling the largest public health event ever in the world.
- In Uganda, Rotarians actively participate in the planning and implementation of NIDs. Thousands of Rotary volunteers assist authorities by providing cold storage facilities to preserve the vaccine, transporting vaccine to immunization posts, and by helping to track children who may have missed the immunization. As respected leaders in their communities, Rotarians play a key advocacy role to win people's confidence in the program.
- Angolan Rotarians lead campaigns to solicit corporate jets, helicopters and vehicles to move vaccine through Angola's land-mine-infested countryside. Additional volunteers mobilized by a single Rotary club help the government reach 80 percent of its target population of children under five years of age.
- In countries like Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Yemen, where there are no Rotary clubs, the PolioPlus program funds vaccine procurement and promotional materials for NIDs.

Some highlights of the polio eradication initiative include:

- According to WHO, the number of polio cases has plunged 80 percent in the past 10 years.

- More than 500,000 cases of polio are prevented each year by the efforts of Rotary, WHO, UNICEF, CDC, national governments and overseas development agencies of donor nations.
- No new cases of polio have been reported in the Western Hemisphere since 1991. Countries in the Americas continue to maintain strong disease-tracking systems to ensure that polio does not re-enter their borders.
- Polio is disappearing from North and Southern Africa and the Middle East.
- During 74 NIDs and other immunization activities conducted in 1998, more than 450 million children received the oral polio vaccine. This represents nearly 75 percent of all the world's children under five.
- It has been a year since the last case of polio was identified in Cambodia, and health experts hope that the transmission has been stopped in all of the former Indochina.

### **Much work remains**

Despite these encouraging developments, health officials warn that polio is still prevalent in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, primarily in highly populated countries. Also, due to underreporting in many regions, only 15 percent of the actual number of polio cases are reported.

To reach the last reservoir of polio, WHO recommends four key strategies to attain polio eradication: maintain high levels of routine immunization coverage; conduct NIDs for children under age five; implement and maintain a rigorous reporting system and laboratory network; and, when necessary, implement "mop-up" efforts -- door-to-door efforts to immunize children in remote areas where pockets of the disease still exist.

WHO reports that polio outbreaks still occur in areas with weak health infrastructures attributed primarily to years of civil conflict and lack of government commitment.

"Perhaps the greatest threats to polio eradication are war and civil strife," says Dr. Harry Hull, WHO Medical Officer. "As clinics are destroyed, war zones become fertile fields for epidemics."

As the polio eradication program enters the final and most difficult phase, WHO recognizes a dire need for greater political will in light of a critical shortfall of funding. In July 1998, WHO estimated a shortfall of approximately \$350 million through 2000, and a total shortfall of \$800 million to take the program through to certification of a polio-free world in 2005.

Recognizing the urgency of the advocacy role, trustees of The Rotary Foundation authorized the appointment of a Task Force on International Advocacy. Its principle job is to coordinate Rotary members' efforts to convince national governments and other funding sources of the urgency, the need, and the benefits of investing the necessary funds to meet the extraordinary costs of polio eradication. According to WHO, polio eradication would save the world \$1.5 billion annually by eliminating the need for routine polio immunization. The U.S. alone would save more than \$230 million a year once polio immunization ceases, money that could be allocated for other health needs.

Rotary's PolioPlus program has evolved throughout the organization's 20-year drive to eliminate one of the most dreaded diseases of all time. In addition to international advocacy to secure outside donor funding, Rotary also created PolioPlus Partners -- an alternative funding mechanism created in 1995 to provide Rotary members at the local level an opportunity to participate in the final and most challenging years of polio eradication. Donations through the PolioPlus

Partners program range from \$100 to \$100,000 and are used to purchase much needed laboratory equipment and promotional items to mobilize communities during NIDs.

Rotary members are doing everything in their power to ensure that polio does not make a comeback and derail the eradication goal. As WHO's Dr. Hull points out, "Unlike many diseases, we have the technology right now to eradicate polio. Never again will we be closer to our goal than we are today."

The world stands firmly on the threshold of victory. Thanks to the achievements of the last two decades, more than one billion children have received the oral polio vaccine and are protected against the disease. UNICEF estimates that more than three million children are playing and walking today who would have been disabled by polio if it had not been for the efforts of Rotary and its global partners in the effort.

What finer gift can we give the children of the next century than a world without polio?