

# OUR FINAL FIGHT AGAINST POLIO

## WE ARE NOT ALONE!



Dear fellow Rotarians,  
 Dear friends,  
 Dear polio eradicators,

Greetings from the World Health Organization headquarters, in Geneva, Switzerland, it is my honour - as a Rotarian myself (Gex - Divonne, France, in District 1710) - to have been asked to guest-author this month's newsletter.

I was heartened to see many dynamic Rotarians in Hamburg in June and more specifically to see how committed we continue to be in our effort to achieve polio eradication.

October is of course World Polio Day month - 24 October is the day, to be exact. It is a great opportunity to raise awareness about the need to eradicate polio once and for all.

This year's World Polio Day will likely be an extremely special one: because we expect some truly spectacular news. An independent commission of experts, reviewing all available global data and evidence, is very likely to conclude that one of the strains of wild poliovirus - type 3

- has been globally eradicated.

As most of you know, there are three individual and immunologically-distinct wild poliovirus strains: wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1), wild poliovirus type 2 (WPV2) and wild poliovirus type 3 (WPV3). Symptomatically, all three strains are identical, in that they cause irreversible paralysis or even death. But there are genetic and virologic differences which make these three strains three separate viruses, which must be eradicated separately. Immunity against one strain does not equate to immunity against the others.

That is why this news - if indeed confirmed - would be so tremendous. WPV3 has not been detected anywhere in the world since 2012, and our global surveillance has actively been searching for it since then, without a trace of it being detected anywhere.

WPV2 has already been declared as globally eradicated, in 2015. This would leave just one serotype still in circulation - WPV1 - and even this strain only continues to transmit in just two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

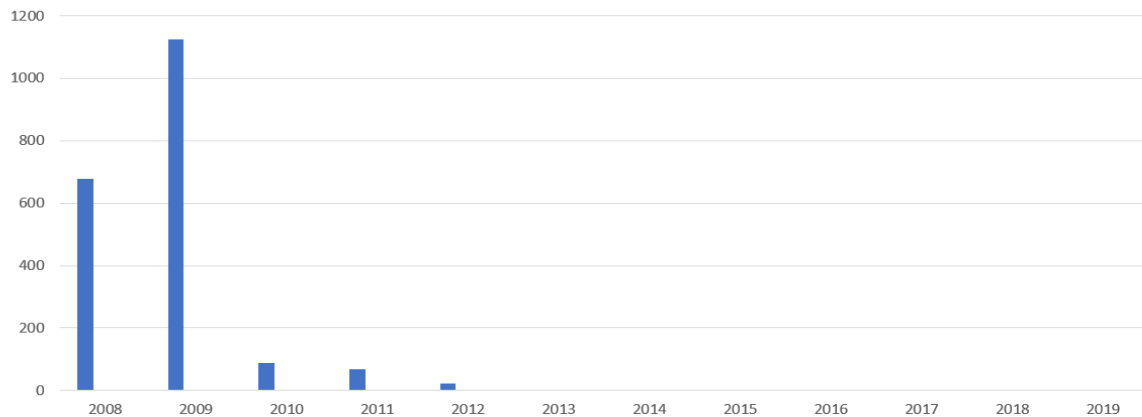
So why would this news be so significant? Well, because it shows us that we can and will eradicate polio. We are knocking out individual family lines of the poliovirus. What we are doing is working!

We are nearly at the finish line. Our biggest enemy now is complacency. It is the very nature of an eradication effort that we either succeed, or we do not. There is no in-between. We know that polio is a highly infectious disease that will not stay confined to the remaining endemic countries. It will spread again, to paralyse children everywhere in the world. And, indeed, we are facing challenges in the remaining two endemic countries where, for a number of political, social, security related reasons, the eradication effort is not doing well as it should be. We are of course working hard to address these challenges and support the national governments in their efforts. I am confident that, in spite of the increase in the number of cases this year, we will soon be back on track in these two countries.

It is critical that we do not stop our efforts, that we do not give up in spite of the challenges, The polio effort

Country	Year-to-date 2019	Year-to-date 2018
<i>Pakistan</i>	58	3
<i>Afghanistan</i>	15	12
<i>Nigeria</i>	0!	0!

# Global WPV3 cases: 2008 - 2019



has faced many such challenges in the past and has always been able to surmount them and gain more ground on the virus. Indeed, such is the tenacity of this virus that, if we stopped now, in ten years we could be seeing over 200,000 new cases of polio every year, all around the world, including in Switzerland. The recent epidemics of measles in many European countries as well as in the USA are a reminder of the impact of complacency with communicable diseases.

I would therefore like to convey to you two messages on this World Polio Day.

The first is a whole hearted ‘Thank You’. Everything you have done has brought us to the brink of being polio free, and to the brink of making history.

Secondly, please keep your persistence and patience, keep your determination, in spite of the likely comments that you hear around you, please redouble your efforts for this last push. We cannot succeed without you. Please continue to lead the way and continue to inspire. Through your steadfast dedication, raise your voice, and hold governments accountable to this fight. Use this year’s World Polio Day on

24 October to mobilise the general public, to raise funds, to help us celebrate the eradication of WPV3.

Together, we can improve the lives of children everywhere. We can continue to make this world more equitable. We can ensure that no child will ever again be paralysed by polio.

We must stay the course. To the very end. Let us finish this job once and for all.

Thank you and many Rotarian Greetings from Geneva

Michel Zaffran

Director of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative

World Health Organization