

## TALKING POINTS: Rotary, polio and COVID-19

### Polio infrastructure support for COVID-19 response:

- Over the next several months the polio infrastructure Rotary helped build – including its tools, workforce, and extensive surveillance networks – will be used to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by supporting preparedness and response activities in many countries, including Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This truly represents the ‘Plus’ in PolioPlus.
- Building on decades of experience stopping polio outbreaks, Rotary and our partners have a critical role to play in protecting communities from this unprecedented pandemic, just as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) did in the past to respond to outbreaks of Ebola, yellow fever, and Avian flu.
- In places like [Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan](#) polio staff are tracing contacts and testing for COVID-19, combatting misinformation and sensitizing health professionals on the disease. The GPEI’s coordination mechanisms – such as hotlines and emergency operations centers – and physical assets like vehicles and computers have also been deployed against COVID-19.
  - **Pakistan:** Polio staff are aiding efforts to strengthen surveillance and raise awareness about COVID-19 across Pakistan. The team has trained hundreds of surveillance officers while also supporting the development of a new data system that’s fully integrated with the system used for polio. Across the country, polio eradication logistics experts are facilitating the distribution of personal protective equipment for the COVID-19 response.
  - Rotarians are providing face masks, personal protection kits to medical staff, repairing ventilators, assisting governments in setting up and monitoring quarantines sites, and utilizing vaccine carriers to transport COVID-19 specimens to laboratories.
  - Rotary’s Polio Resource Centers are helping the fight against COVID-19 by sensitizing religious leaders and community influencers, producing posters with information on hygiene and physical distancing, and providing food rations to families in need.
  - **Nigeria:** In Ogun and Lagos states, over 50 polio program medical staff are conducting contact tracing, disease detection and data collection and analysis to stem the spread of COVID-19. World Health Organization field offices used for polio eradication coordination across the country are now supporting COVID-19 teams, and the GPEI is lending phones, vehicles and administrative support to the response.
  - **Afghanistan:** Over 3,750 community volunteers who typically support polio surveillance in Afghanistan are now promoting handwashing and positive hygiene practices in communities to reduce transmission and exposure to COVID-19.

## Status of polio immunization activities

- We must take every precaution to ensure that polio eradication activities do not contribute to COVID-19 transmission. For that reason, to observe global guidance related to physical distancing and hygiene practices, all countries have been advised to pause polio immunization campaigns during the COVID-19 outbreak response
- While responding to COVID-19, Rotary and our partners will work to continue protecting children to avoid a resurgence of polio and will maintain essential polio eradication work, including surveillance. In fact, polio surveillance workers are now searching for both polio *and* COVID-19 symptoms – and are increasing the chances of early detection. We will continue working to strengthen immunization in certain at-risk areas and will maintain our vaccine supply so that campaigns can begin without delay as soon as it is safe.

## Rotary support for PolioPlus

- Rotarians can stay focused on our work eradicating polio even as we face a pandemic of a virus for which there is not yet a vaccine, a situation similar to what the world faced with the poliovirus not so long ago.
- As the world responds to COVID-19, there is a significant risk that many children will miss out on life-saving vaccines that prevent dangerous diseases, including polio.
- While confronting the new challenges of today, the most important thing that Rotary members can do to continue the fight to end polio is to sustain our commitment to polio eradication and reach our fundraising goal of \$50 million dollars this year.
- Continued contributions to PolioPlus will ensure that polio eradication activities that are ongoing -- such as surveillance and vaccine supply – continue, and that we come out of this crisis strong and tackle the remaining barriers to a polio-free world.
- We know that many members are seeking to support COVID-19 response. We hope Rotarians will see that polio and COVID-19 are dual priorities, and urge Rotarians to consider supporting both PolioPlus and COVID-19 efforts to the extent that members are able to during this difficult time. This is not a question of either/or—both are of great importance.
- Districts are encouraged to consider contributing District Designated Funds to PolioPlus. Donations of DDF are matched 1:1 by the World Fund, then 2:1 by the Gates Foundation for a total of a 6:1 match.
- In the midst of a global pandemic, we recognize that attention to polio eradication will be diverted, but this makes it all the more vital for Rotarians to remain strongly committed to fighting polio and not let our progress be eroded.