

Rotary International
End Polio Now - The Last Hurdle

>> Narrator: Since the mid-1980s, Rotary International's PolioPlus program has fought to eradicate polio worldwide. Working with its partners in the global polio-eradication initiative, raising and deploying hundreds of millions of dollars and relying on tens of thousands of tireless volunteers, the international humanitarian organization has helped immunize more than two billion children.

Polio cases have declined more than 99 percent, and the number of polio endemic countries has dropped from 125 to only 4.

One of those countries is India. But even here, with a population of 1 billion people, fewer than 1,000 new cases are reported each year.

Many occur in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where population density, malnutrition, and poor sanitation lead to chronic illness. Under such conditions, children need extra doses of the polio vaccine

>> Deepak Kapur: They used to say that three doses of the vaccine are enough. In Southern India, they found perhaps seven were enough. In other parts of India, the number went up to twelve. Here in U.P., perhaps even seventeen or eighteen is not enough.

>> Narrator: The government's immunization program needs additional support.

>> Deepak Kapur: These kids tend to contract polio because they have not received the best dose or the doses that often.

>> Narrator: So, several times a year, Rotary's national PolioPlus committee in India stages immunization days, often covering as much as 70 percent of the country.

A group of American Rotary Club members visited India during one such event.

>> Robert Hall: My wife Charlene said one day, "We've given a lot of money -- our district has -- but we've never seen this thing, we've never been there."

>> Narrator: What they witnessed took their breath away. In Uttar Pradesh alone, health workers dispensed polio vaccine at more than 100,000 immunization booths.

In the industrial city of Moradabad, the city's 13 Rotary Clubs sponsored 65 booths and provided support to more than 2800 others.

>> Jim Philips: It's incredible. With not too many dollars, these Rotarians and the partners in the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the state of India are doing a tremendous job, very effectively, very efficiently.

>> B.S. Mathur: And I am proud of my Rotarians of the state, of Moradabad. We are working very hard. We are working very hard.

>> Donna Philips: I watched a father bring his baby this morning to be immunized. After that was done, he shook each of the Rotarian's hand -- shook their hand and put his hand to his heart, as if to say thank you for saving his child.

>> Narrator: By the end of booth day, more than 17 million infants and children have been immunized in Uttar Pradesh alone. Still, that left more than half unaccounted for. So, for the next six days, teams of government health workers visited every house in every village in Uttar Pradesh.

>> Deepak Kapur: They have 125,000 workers who are going from door to door in the entire state. The figures are mind-boggling.

>> Narrator: When the week was over, as many as 136 million children have been immunized, and the dream of Rotary's PolioPlus campaign, "Happy, healthy children in a polio-free India," was still very much alive.

>> Charlene Hall: Well, one thing we hope to do on this trip is to be able to go back and tell other Rotarians how close we are, really, to finishing this task.

>> Jim Philips: If we don't get those last handful of cases, really, polio will come back -- probably stronger than it ever was. So this is a big push and in a very compact sort of time frame.

>> Deepak Kapur: 99 percent of the job is done. We cannot give it up only at the last hurdle. We've got to cross that hurdle. And believe me, the job that is to be done can be done.

>> Narrator: You can help Rotary end polio forever at rotary.org/endpolio.

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