



# ROTARY

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Rotary celebrates India's first polio-free year, but cautions the job is not yet finished**

**EVANSTON, Ill. (Jan. 13, 2012)** — Rotary members worldwide are cautiously celebrating a major milestone in the global effort to eradicate the crippling disease polio: India, until recently an epicenter of the wild poliovirus, has gone a full calendar year without recording a new case.

Leaders of the humanitarian service organization see the Jan. 13 milestone as a testament to the determination of its international membership of 1.2 million – and especially the 116,000-plus Rotarians of India – to eradicate the infectious disease through the mass immunization of children, a goal Rotary took on 27 years ago.

“With the support of their Rotary brothers and sisters around the world, Indian Rotarians have worked diligently month after month, year after year, to help organize and carry out the National Immunization Days that reach millions of children with the oral polio vaccine,” said Rotary International President Kalyan Banerjee, of Vapi, India. “As an Indian, I am immensely proud of what Rotary has accomplished. However, we know this is not the end of our work. Rotary and our partners must continue to immunize children in India and in other countries until the goal of a polio-free world is finally achieved.”

Deepak Kapur, of New Delhi, who chairs Rotary's polio eradication program in India, also credits the Indian Health Ministry for its commitment to the effort. To date, the Indian government has spent more than \$1.2 billion on domestic polio eradication activities. “Government support is crucial if we are to defeat polio, and we are fortunate that our government is our biggest advocate in this effort,” Kapur said.

“Marching ahead, the goal now is to sustain this momentum,” he added, describing as potentially “decisive” the upcoming immunization rounds in January, February, and March, which aim to vaccinate 174 million children against polio.

If all ongoing testing for polio cases through Jan. 13 continues to yield negative results, India will be declared by the World Health Organization to have interrupted transmission of indigenous wild poliovirus, laying the groundwork for its removal from the polio-endemic countries list which it now shares with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria. However, other countries remain at risk for cases imported from the endemic countries, which is why immunizations in India and other endemic and at-risk countries must continue. Neighboring Pakistan, which has reported 181 cases so far for 2011, is a major threat to India's continued polio-free status. In 2011, a polio outbreak in China, polio-free for a decade, was traced genetically to Pakistan.

Rotary launched its polio eradication program in 1985 and in 1988 became a spearheading partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since then, the incidence of polio has plummeted by more than 99 percent, from more than 350,000 cases a year to only 604 reported so far for 2011. The 12-month milestone in India – where the last reported case was a two-year-old girl in West Bengal on Jan. 13, 2011 -- continues the progress of 2010, when the country recorded only 42 polio cases out of 1,352 worldwide.

In addition to raising awareness and advocating within the public and private sectors on behalf of the cause, Rotary members to date have contributed more than \$1 billion in support of polio eradication. In all, about \$136.67 million in Rotary money has funded polio eradication work in India via grants to WHO and UNICEF. Indian Rotary members have raised more than \$11.6 million to fight polio, and Rotary clubs worldwide currently are closing in on a \$200 million fundraising milestone in response to a \$355 million challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which also identifies polio eradication as a top priority.

Rotary is a global humanitarian organization with more than 1.2 million members in 34,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. Rotary members are men and women who are business, professional and community leaders with a shared commitment to make the world a better place through humanitarian service. Rotary's top priority is the global eradication of polio.

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