



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Winning the Global War Against Polio

Progress Toward Interruption of Wild Poliovirus Transmission — Worldwide, January 2007–April 2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Twenty years ago, a group of ministers of health from around the world resolved to collaborate to eradicate one of the most horrendous childhood diseases known to man — poliomyelitis, commonly known as polio. At the time, the paralyzing disease was infecting more than 1,000 children each day in 125 countries on 5 continents. Overcoming logistical nightmares, civil wars, and language barriers, millions of volunteers from hundreds of countries have helped vaccinate billions of children to bring this plague to the verge of extinction.

Dr. Steve Wassilak is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, and he's joining us today to discuss progress towards eliminating polio worldwide. Welcome to the show, Steve.

[Dr. Wassilak] Thanks, Robert.

[Dr. Gaynes] Steve, how close are we to eradicating polio worldwide?

[Dr. Wassilak] We're getting closer and closer. We're down to four countries in which polio remains in circulation. Those countries are India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the greatest challenges to ending polio in these remaining countries?

[Dr. Wassilak] In all these countries, there are problems in routine delivery of health services, routine immunization delivery. In some of the countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, there are major problems in security, access to children. In Nigeria, there are political problems and logistical problems that have prevented the delivery of routine immunization and immunization in campaigns.

[Dr. Gaynes] Steve, do you have an estimate of how many people have been given the polio vaccine since the worldwide eradication effort began 20 years ago?

[Dr. Wassilak] I have a rough estimation, but just to put it in perspective, last year, there were 400 million children under five vaccinated just in 2007. So you could do a rough calculation of 20 times that. But primarily the biggest effort has been in the last 10 years. So we'd have to say about 5 billion children.

[Dr. Gaynes] What groups and organizations have played major roles in helping to eliminate polio?

[Dr. Wassilak] Obviously, it's not *one* group or *one* country that's played a singular role; it's everybody together. At the beginning, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rotary International, and UNICEF have formed a primary partnership to make this effort go forward. Among those, Rotary International has contributed immensely in terms of the number of volunteers and mobilizing funds politically and providing their own funds. And now, recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has come in as a strong partner, as well.

[Dr. Gaynes] When did the last case of polio occur in the United States?

[Dr. Wassilak] The last outbreak of polio was in 1979 in multiple states. The last case of wild polio, at all, occurred in 1993, brought in from the outside.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are we still at risk for polio in this country?

[Dr. Wassilak] As long as polio is circulating anywhere in the world, we have some risk, even in the U.S.

[Dr. Gaynes] When polio is finally eradicated, will vaccination still be necessary?

[Dr. Wassilak] In the United States, vaccination with inactivated polio vaccine will continue for security reasons, even after polio is eradicated.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about polio eradication?

[Dr. Wassilak] The best website is www.polioeradication.org; *polioeradication* is as one word. *Eradication* is spelled e-r-a-d-i-c-a-t-i-o-n. That's www.polioeradication.org.

[Dr. Gaynes] Steve, thanks for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Wassilak] Thanks very much, Robert.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's it for this week's show. Be sure and join us again next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.