

Rotary's Promise: Eradicating Polio

The first North American polio epidemic began in 1894, with 132 recorded cases. Throughout much of the 20th century, the disease was a summer horror that paralyzed and killed thousands every year. In 1955, vaccines (created by Jonas Salk and Albert Bruce Sabin) provided great relief, but did not fully eradicate polio.

In 1985 there were still approximately 1,000 new cases of polio recorded every single day; and for Rotarians, this was simply unacceptable. So, Rotary International founded the PolioPlus program to eliminate polio, and promised to continue until the disease was eradicated. This was the most ambitious program in Rotary's history, and the world's largest public health initiative not initiated by a government agency. Since then, Rotary has partnered with the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, UNICEF, the Gates Foundation, and governments around the world.

On National Immunization Days, Rotarians, and members of partner organizations, still travel the world to give children pre-



cious doses of polio vaccine. Countless cases of severe visual impairment have also been prevented due to the addition of Vitamin A. Additionally, volunteers distribute soap, clean water, hand-operated bikes, and malaria-preventing nets.

Rotarians can also be proud that the infrastructure they helped build to fight polio is now being used to stop the spread of COVID-19. Rotary clubs around the world have mustered during this pandemic to distribute Personal Protective Equipment, ventilators, and other medical apparatuses.

We can all be grateful to Rotary for giving their word to the children of the world to eradicate polio. (I write this as both a polio survivor and a proud Rotarian.) Some organizations would have given up after 37 years, but not Rotary! Today, millions of people are living, breathing and walking, who would never have had that chance without this incredible organization.

IMAGINE THIS: IMAGINE ROTARY. 🦋



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