Ridding the World of Polio

Information Pack

Rotary Crocus Campaign
www.rotarycrocus.com
What is Polio?

Polio is a disease which kills and paralyses young children. It spreads like wild-fire. There’s no cure and it can paralyse in just a few hours. However, it can be easily prevented through immunisation.

Polio has existed for thousands of years and at least since the time of the ancient Egyptians. Here’s a carving of a priest with a withered leg which is one of the signs of Polio.

How does Polio spread?

When a child is infected with Polio the virus enters the body through the mouth and grows in the intestine. It is passed into the faeces which carries the disease.

If food or drink is contaminated with this faeces the disease can spread. This can easily happen for example, when children who are not yet toilet trained get the disease or when there is poor hygiene and sanitation in a community. If the faeces get into the water supply the disease will spread rapidly. Flies can also carry the disease from faeces to food.

Not everyone infected with Polio will become paralysed. This happens to only about 1 in 200 people infected. The rest have no signs of the illness and are not aware they have been infected. However, they silently carry the disease and can infect thousands of others.

All it takes is for one of these silent carriers to get on a plane and go to another country and the disease can spread rapidly.
Life with Polio

Up to 20 million people in the world today are paralysed with Polio.

Sometimes Polio affects the lungs and the survivor cannot breathe on their own. They used to have to live in ‘Iron Lungs’ which helped them breathe for a few days or a week until their condition improved. Nowadays these huge ‘Iron Lungs’ have been replaced by smaller machines.

Polio survivors often lose the use of their legs and have to use leg braces and crutches. Many are too poor to buy a wheelchair or artificial legs and braces and some have no option but to shuffle on their hands or use makeshift buggies.

Fortunately there are charities like the Artificial Limb Centre in Karachi, Pakistan, which has supplied free artificial limbs and callipers to thousands of survivors. Each limb is individually made to fit the person, and is made and fitted in just a few hours. With their new limbs they are able to walk out of the Centre into more fulfilling lives and in the process regain their self-confidence. They are able to run and even play sports like football.
How can we stop Polio?

Polio can be prevented by immunisation. This is where you give a tiny bit of the disease to a child. It sounds like a strange thing to do but this isn’t enough to give them Polio. It is enough for the body to build up its own anti-Polio defences so that if it comes into contacts with the real Polio virus in the future it can fight it off.

All it takes is 2 drops of medicine to immunise a child.

If enough people in a community are immunised the Polio virus will not have anyone to infect and will die out.

Polio Eradication Programme

In 1988 around 1,000 people every day were getting Polio. Polio was present in over 125 countries.

Then Rotary, followed by the World Health Organisation and some other organisations decided to try and remove Polio from the world.

Now, Rotary is not a medical organisation. It’s just a group of men and women from all over the world who volunteer their time, talents and professional skills to improve the lives of others. They felt that Polio was a terrible disease and wanted to do something about it. Millions of Rotarians have volunteered to help and they have raised over £600 million to pay for Polio vaccines. They also support survivors through projects like the Artificial Limb Centre in Karachi.

Eradicating Polio is the hardest medical challenge the world has faced. Over 2.5 billion children have been given the Polio drops in more than 200 countries by some 20 million volunteers. Children all over the world. Children in cities and the countryside.
In some remote areas there are no maps and the immunisation teams have to find every tiny village. If they miss out even just a small percentage of children the disease would have enough people to infect and could spread again.

This is how many countries had Polio in 1988:

Now, nearly 30 years later, only 3 countries – Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan – have never been free of Polio, but this will change. These are called Polio-endemic countries. Whereas in 1988 1,000 children per day were getting Polio, now it’s less than one child.

Polio is now 99% of the way to being eradicated. This final stage is the most difficult as Polio affects very remote and often very dangerous areas of the world.

Map source: World Health Organisation / Global Polio Eradication Initiative
Sometimes as refugees flee these dangerous areas they carry the disease to other areas which are Polio free. This is no problem if all children in the places the refugees go to have had their Polio drops. But if some have not then the disease can spread again. This has happened recently in Syria. There is a terrible civil war there which has meant that less children are being immunised against Polio and there has been an outbreak.

To stop this happening we have to make sure that almost every child in the world has their Polio drops – even in countries where there hasn’t been Polio for many years. That’s why every child in the UK is protected against Polio. Only when there are no more cases of Polio for three years can we say we have finally got rid of this terrible disease.

Hopefully this will happen by 2018 and the world will be finally Polio free.

**Polio in Numbers:**

- **99%**: Polio is 99% of its way to being eradicated.
- **350,000**: the number of people who were struck by Polio in 1985.
- **223**: the number of people who were struck by Polio last year.
- **2.5 billion**: the number of children immunised globally since 1988. That’s 3.3 children per second!
- **5**: the majority of children that get Polio are under the age of 5.
- **3**: the number of countries still with Polio.
- **2**: the number of drops it takes to protect a child against Polio.
- **40p**: the cost of protecting a child against Polio.
- **2018**: when we hope Polio will be removed from the world.
- **£6 billion**: the cost of Polio immunisation so far.
- **£600 million**: the amount Rotary has contributed so far.
- **£3.5 billion**: the cost to complete the immunisation programme.
When did you get Polio?
I was 15 months old and living in Lagos, Nigeria. I had been given two doses of Polio vaccine, but the virus caught me before I had the third and final dose. I don’t know when my Mum was finally told I had Polio and I can’t imagine how this would’ve made her feel. It must have been an incredibly difficult time. I think most people in Nigeria knew somebody who had been affected by Polio back in the 1970’s.

What has motivated you to become a successful paralympian?
From an early age I always felt I had to be successful, I owed it to my parents. I even told my parents that I was going to become a doctor and one day I would discover the cure for Polio.

How did you get into basketball?
I discovered wheelchair basketball when I was twelve. I was spotted by two Physiotherapists who saw me as I was being pushed through the streets of East London in a Tesco’s shopping trolley by my friends – it was the only way I could keep up with them. They wanted to teach young disabled children in the area how to be independent using sport. They introduced me to wheelchair basketball. From that moment I had one burning ambition, to win a medal in the Paralympics for Great Britain.

You achieved that dream, and many other sporting successes aswell.
Yes, I played for Great Britain at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics. Later I won a bronze, and a silver medal, at the 2002 and 2005 European Championships and captained my country to a silver medal at the 2002 World Championships in Japan. In 2004 I achieved my lifelong ambition, winning a medal at the Athens Paralympics.

You recently made a documentary about your trip to Nigeria to find out about Polio there.
Going back to Nigeria to learn about polio was an incredibly humbling experience. In Nigeria seeing people who have had polio is the norm. Most don’t have wheelchairs. Instead, they ride through the dusty chaotic streets on homemade skateboards. They’re usually lean, muscular and their eyes tell the story of a hard existence.

The people that I met, the stories they tell, the things I saw when I was in Nigeria made me laugh, cry and sometimes want to pull my dreads out in frustration. Most of all it’s made me more determined to help end Polio worldwide. This is the journey of my lifetime. With the public’s help, we now have the chance to eradicate Polio. There has never been a better time to donate as every £1 donated will translate into £3 with the funding from the Gates Foundation – which is enough to vaccinate seven children. So I am urging everyone to get behind Rotary and help make history by eradicating this terrible disease once and for all.
When did you get Polio?
I was born in India in 1979, and when I was six months old, I contracted Polio, which paralyzed my legs. With no means of supporting me, and my legs dangling like spaghetti, my mother brought me to an orphanage. A few years later, the Anglican Bishop from Yukon, Canada, Ronald Ferris, and his family adopted me.

Thanks to the support of my new family and several operations, I learned to walk with crutches and braces. I learned to remain positive, focusing on what I can do and the obstacles I can overcome, rather than what I can’t do.

You went back to India to meet you biological mother. Tell us about that?
In 2002, I returned to India to meet my mother. It was during this visit that I got a glimpse of what my life might have been like if I had not been put up for adoption and received all the medical care which I did. I was horrified to see a young man in his twenties crawling in the dirt begging, with sandals on his hands and ripped-up pieces of tire on his knees. When I saw that, I vowed that I would not allow this to happen to anyone else. I don’t believe any person in our global community should be doomed to live in dirt. I have since dedicated my life to raising awareness about polio eradication.

You have also done an incredible fundraising cycle across Canada?
In 2008, to raise awareness about this in Canada I hand-cycled 4,400 miles across Canada. That’s like going from the Lands End to John o’ Groats 7 times. It took me 174 days. I gave 200 presentations along the way, including to many schools, and raised £200,000 for Polio eradication.

What keeps you so motivated?
I am continually inspired by the commitments of others, especially the 1.3 million fellow Rotarians worldwide working to eradicate Polio, and the countless vaccinators and health workers on the ground devoted to protecting children from the disease.

We are so close to eradicating Polio. This final stage is the most difficult but with everyone’s help we can conquer Polio and rid this terrible disease from the world.