

A Final Push on Polio Eradication

Ask your MP to be a polio champion and leave a lasting legacy.

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Saturday 24 October marked World Polio Day 2015. This year, the world is in a stronger position than ever to end polio, putting us on the verge of eradicating a human disease for only the second time in history. India and South-East Asia have been declared polio-free, outbreaks in the Middle East and Horn of Africa appear to have ended, and Nigeria has stopped transmission of wild polio. All have been removed from the list of endemic countries. Now, only two countries in the world have recorded wild polio cases in 2015: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

However if we stop our work now, all the progress we have made will be undone. That is why, this month, we are asking you to meet your MP and gain their support for the eradication of polio by becoming a 'Polio Champion'. We will need them to encourage the Department for International Developments (DFID) continued work with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and ask them to provide the additional resources needed to end polio for good. The UK can be a real leader in the final eradication of polio. This will be a significant part of achieving the new Global Goals, and leaving a legacy of which the UK government can be justly proud.

What is Polio?

Polio is a highly infectious, viral disease that mainly affects children under the age of 5. It invades the nervous system and can cause irreversible paralysis within a matter of hours. In certain instances, it will also cause death. Although safe and effective vaccines exist, there is no cure for polio.

In the early 20th century, polio paralysed hundreds of thousands of children every year and was one of the most feared diseases in industrialised countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. Today, only two countries in the world have recorded wild polio cases: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

What is the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and what has already been achieved?

As the title suggests, the GPEI is the global body charged with ensuring there is a plan to eradicate polio. The GPEI has a comprehensive, long-term strategy to address the ways to deliver a polio-free world by 2018; this is called *The Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan*, or just *The Plan*.

The GPEI works in some of the most difficult places in the world. Conflicts and insecurity have provided a great obstacle in reaching all children, especially those most at risk. However, due to the courageous work of health workers, huge strides have been made in the elimination of polio. With no cases of polio in Africa for a year and outbreaks contained in the Horn of

Africa and Syria, the momentum has never been stronger.

The world has also seen extra benefits from the polio eradication scheme; the infrastructure that has been built up to fight the disease, such as health workers, outreach volunteers and drop-in clinics, are also strengthening routine immunisation for other preventable diseases. The eradication of polio will also provide an important pathway to reaching the Global Goals, particularly Goal 3, 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'.

What will happen without new resources?

Now is not the time for celebration or complacency. The nature of polio is such that one carrier of the disease can cause an epidemic in a remarkably short amount of time. We must build on our current momentum and take the opportunity to end polio. If we fail to provide the resources needed to eradicate polio from its last remaining strongholds, within 10 years we could see as many as 200,000 new cases every year, all over the world. We cannot afford for decades of work and investment to be wasted.

Why is action needed now?

Lessons learnt from the successes in other countries are being translated to Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are also showing signs of progress. The GPEI has

re-evaluated the eradication timeline and the resources needed to reach our goal.

The current plan for eradicating polio is funded until 2018, but a Midterm Review undertaken by the GPEI has established the need for an additional investment of \$1.5 billion to 2019 – a relatively modest amount. This increase in spending will provide value for money by focusing on prevention rather than cure. With renewed political and financial support from the international community, and with full commitment from Pakistan and Afghanistan, we can leave a lasting legacy: that no child is ever paralysed or killed by polio again.

What is the process for achieving this?

By the end of 2015, GPEI will complete a ‘business case’ that outlines the need for increased resourcing. This business case will also have a financial ask for donor governments which will need to be agreed and pledged. Whilst there is no specific timescale for this yet, governments are likely to pledge in the first few months of 2016. We believe that major donors, such as the UK, need to continue to lead polio eradication efforts and leverage its existing commitments as well as encouraging other donor countries to follow suit.

When DfID looks at the business case early in the new year, it is important that there is already wide support among parliamentarians. To ensure this happens, we need to engage politicians now. We need to explain in advance that it is important to go the final mile on

polio eradication over the next few years and get rid of it for good.

What is the UK’s role in the GPEI business case?

The UK has currently pledged £300 million towards polio eradication from 2013-2019. We have a raft of new MPs in place following the general election earlier this year. Some of those MPs will have little, if any knowledge of polio. We need to engage both with these new MPs and those that have been in post before this year. That is why we are asking those who have previously been very active in raising this issue to become ‘Polio Champions’ and share their support (hopefully) one last time.

As DFID works to develop its priorities for health, we want the UK to be a real leader in the final eradication of polio. This will be a significant part of achieving the new Global Goals, and leaving a legacy of which the UK government can be justly proud.

As a part of this leadership, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) this month (27-29 November), the UK has the chance to lead support amongst Commonwealth Heads of Government for a renewed commitment to polio eradication.

Take action

- 1. Arrange a meeting with your MP to discuss the final push on polio. You can talk about why polio eradication is so important, the benefits of investing in eradication and what they can do to help end polio for good.**
- 2. Tell them their support will be needed early next year. But they may be prepared to ask DfID now what its plans are for considering the GPEI’s ‘business case’, or whether DfID envisages continuing to resource polio eradication at a similar level to the present. Detailed talking points can be found in Background Sheet 2.**
- 3. From Monday 16 November, MPs can sign a GPEI pledge asking them to be a Polio Champion and commit themselves to helping end polio within this Parliament. Visit www.onelastpush.org and go to the ‘Act Now’ tab. THIS FUNCTIONALITY WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE UNTIL MONDAY 16 NOVEMBER.**
- 4. Ask your MP to ensure that the UK takes the lead at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) to gain their support for a renewed commitment to polio eradication. See background sheet 1.**
- 5. Share RESULTS’ new Polio Infographic far and wide so we can gain widespread support for the eradication of polio. Sample tweet: Polio doesn’t need to be a game of chance like snakes and ladders. It is possible. We can #EndPolio forever [insert polio graphic].**