

## **Polio Plus Report - Jane Williams District 7450 Polio Chair**

As 2013 draws to a close, it is important to note and be encouraged by the progress that we Rotarians – along with the global community- have made in wiping out the dreaded polio disease; and of course, we must also be realistic about the challenges we face and the need to keep pursuing the end goal – the total eradication of polio from the face of the earth.

First the good news: · In Afghanistan, no indigenous cases of wild poliovirus have occurred all year - all cases are linked to cross-border transmission with neighboring Pakistan.

- In Nigeria, the polio virus is increasingly geographically restricted – primarily to Kano and Borno states. Over the past 4 months, only four cases have occurred in the country, despite the onset of the rainy season (the “high season” for polio transmission).
- The Horn of Africa outbreak is on the decline, including in Banadir, Somalia, the “engine” of the outbreak (no cases since July).
- Across-regional emergency approach is being implemented in the Middle East where more than 20 million children will be immunized because of the recent infections in Syria. Dr. Bruce Aylward of the W.H.O. assures us that all children passing through refugee camps will be immunized.
- The overriding operational priority for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative is to ensure all children are reached during supplementary immunization activities during the 2014 ‘low season’ for polio transmission.

And now for the challenges:

- In Pakistan, the primary problems reside in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), in particular North Waziristan. During the ‘high season’ in the past four months, 52 cases of wild poliovirus have been reported from FATA, with evidence of widespread geographic transmission across the country. Areas within Pakistan are being re-infected, as is neighboring Afghanistan, and the outbreak in the Middle East originated in Pakistan. North Waziristan is the area with the largest number of children being paralyzed by poliovirus in Pakistan. Immunization activities have been suspended by local leaders since June 2012. It is critical that children in all areas are vaccinated and protected from poliovirus. Immunizations in neighboring high-risk areas are being intensified, to further boost population immunity levels in those areas and prevent further spread of this outbreak.

This time last year we had only 214 polio infections globally. To date this year we are at 360. Only 136 of those 360 cases were in endemic countries, Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The remaining 224 cases were from non-endemic countries, primarily Somalia where 183 children were infected. So one can see that political unrest and instability represent major roadblocks to eradication of the disease, but Dr. Aylward of the W.H.O. remains optimistic about our ability to overcome these obstacles. After all, if India can obtain and retain polio-free status, we can make it happen everywhere!