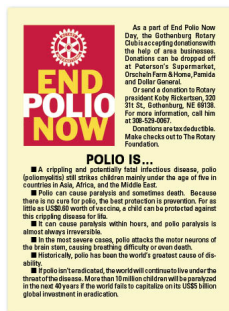


## Rotary raises funds to end polio worldwide

Written by Greg Viergutz

Thursday, 22 October 2009 19:47 -

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A 24-year-old goal of Rotary clubs to eradicate polio worldwide is close to being attained, but additional money is needed to accomplish that dream.

Called PolioPlus, the drive is the most ambitious program in Rotary's history.

Rotary's overall contribution to the eradication effort totals nearly \$800 million.

Rotary International, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the British and German governments in January committed more than \$630 million in new funds to fight polio, a crippling and sometimes fatal disease that still paralyzes children in parts of Africa and Asia and threatens children everywhere. In addition to pledging needed funds, leaders urged additional donors and leaders of countries where polio still exists to join them in aggressive push for eradication.

Polio has been completely eliminated in the Americas, the Western Pacific and Europe, but the wild polio virus persists in Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. Imported cases from these countries threaten other developing nations, Rotary officials said.

It is in these four countries that the most serious challenges exist, including vaccine effectiveness (India), low vaccination coverage rates (Nigeria) and access problems due to conflict (Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Jim Shreck, Rotary District 5630 governor, recently was presented with a State of Nebraska Proclamation declaring Oct. 24 the official "End Polio Now Day."

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Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman praised Rotary Clubs throughout the world for their efforts to eradicate polio worldwide. Nebraska Rotary Districts 5630 and 5440 are working together with citizens of their communities to raise awareness of World Polio Day Oct. 24 and to garner money for the PolioPlus Program.

In addition to the Gates Foundation, Rotary is partnering with the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

“As an international community, we have few opportunities to do something that is unquestionably good for every country and every child, in perpetuity,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, World Health Organization director-general. “Polio eradication is one of these opportunities.”