



Polio: Eradicated, But Can It Return?

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October 24th is World Polio Day. This communicable disease spreads through human-to-human contact, usually entering the body through the mouth due to faecally contaminated water or food, causing paralysis of essential muscles, such as those controlling swallowing, heartbeat, and respiration. Sixty years ago, the largest number of polio victims was reported in the United States. In 1952, there were 57,879 cases reported with 3,145 deaths. In a weeklong special on National Public Radio (NPR) News, McCarthy [1] reported that India has been free of polio that has afflicted it for millennia. India has 175 million children aged 5 years and younger and all of them are the target for the massive campaign that has nearly enabled India to claim a polio-free status. With this success, the world has never been closer to eradicating polio. Since World Polio Day in 2011, India is able to claim no new cases since January 11, 2011. This is historic and offers hope and a resurgence of effort to eradicate this crippling disease in the few active regions of remaining endemic countries. NPR reports that a decade ago, Nigeria perceived the war on polio to be a “Western plot to sterilize Muslim children” [2]. Conversely, the countries of India and Pakistan may find polio to be the ultimate exercise in diplomacy in that polio may knit program strategies together as they seize this historic moment for global health [1]. Since the 2011 World Polio Day, the number of new cases of polio has declined from 467 at this time last year to 171 this year. In the developing world, children are given an oral vaccine made

of a live, no paralytic polio virus. The vaccination entails two drops for partial immunity, making mass vaccination campaigns achievable in poor countries [3]. The vaccine causes an infection that usually lasts a few weeks. The infection can spread to others and immunize them, too. However, but if the virus spreads too far among previously unvaccinated people, its genes will change and the virus will regain its ability to cripple and kill such as the outbreak of paralytic polio in Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 2000 and 2001, crippling 21. The World Health Organization reported more than 1,300 cases of the disease in 16 countries in 2005, with cases in Indonesia, South Asia and West Africa. Our strongest motive for writing this editorial was to take this opportunity to thank the medical professionals who worked during the polio epidemic and to recognize the efforts of the health staff of the time whose names never made it to print. The health professionals of the day not only rose to the challenge, but learned from it; their robust and optimistic response has ultimately eradicated the disease hopefully.

References

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Received October 25, 2012; Accepted October 26, 2012; Published October 31, 2012

Citation: Hansen C, Sethi R (2012) Polio: Eradicated, But Can It Return? Air Water Borne Dis 1:e119. doi:[10.4172/2167-7719.1000e119](https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-7719.1000e119)

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