

Why polio remains a public health problem of international importance?

Editorial

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),¹ Polio or poliomyelitis is a crippling and potentially fatal infectious disease, caused by poliovirus which spreads from person to person and can invade an infected person's brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis (can't move parts of the body). This infectious viral disease mainly affects young children. It is transmitted through contaminated food and water, multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system.² The World Health Organization's Executive Board has declared polio eradication a programmatic emergency for global public health. The world has the tools to improve quality, to reach and immunize children and eradicate polio. Despite the efforts to eradicate polio, the disease rests endemic in a couple developing countries, resulting in a high risk of importation to other polio-free countries that may warrant any possibility of reemergence in countries certified polio free.

The Figure 1 show that the worldwide polio cases have fallen from 350,000 in 1988 to 407 in 2013, a decline of 99% of cases reported or 99% dropped in polio incidence. Therefore, the world has made significant progress toward global Polio eradication over the last 26 years (CDC, 2015). Four regions of the world are certified polio-free: the Americas, Europe, South East Asia and the Eastern Pacific. Only three polio-endemic countries (countries that have never interrupted the transmission of wild poliovirus) remain-Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan (CDC, 2015). My experience as STOP (Stop of Transmission Of Polio) in Chad and Benin (Africa) was a great opportunity to assist these countries by overseeing/supervising the planning, execution and evaluation of the National Immunization Days and Polio surveillance; and to provide technical support for Polio eradication activities, with a focus on supplementary immunization in context of synchronized National Immunization Days in Central and West Africa. With the growing number of armed conflicts-affected areas, war zones and increased migrations especially the high risk populations such as refugees, travelers, mobile population groups or displaced; the vaccination efforts will be more difficult to undertake. Therefore, the risk of polio reemergence in the world remains a serious public health emergency and threatened the global health.

Failure to eradicate polio has both immediate and long term consequences; Poliovirus will again spread from polio-affected countries, sparking large polio outbreaks in area with weak immunity, potentially with high fatality rates; within a decade, the disease could reestablish itself globally, paralyzing many children again every year. This failure to eradicate polio may as well be precluding financial benefits estimated at a minimum of \$40-50 billions US dollars by 2035, for low-income countries alone.³ In addition, all global immunization programs which aim to save the lives of millions of children will also be threaten for years. Therefore ending Polio forever is a critical step

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Koffitse Atchon

Department of Community, Rush University Medical Center, USA

Correspondence: Koffitse Atchon, Adjunct Faculty, Rush University Medical Center, Department of Community, Systems and Mental Health Nursing, 600 S Paulina St, #1060A, Chicago, IL, USA, Tel 1 (312) 9425899, Fax 1 (312) 9426226, Email chkatchon@gmail.com

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in protecting all children from this vaccine preventable disease and no child anywhere in the world will have to suffer from this crippling disease. Achieving Polio-free world will prove what's possible when the global community applies the latest experts recommendations and comes together to stop the spread of the wild poliovirus; and improve children's lives preserving the well-being of our future generation.

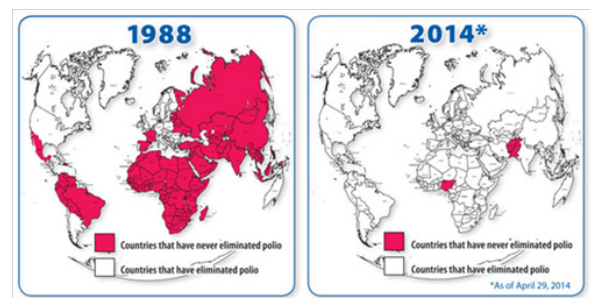


Figure 1 Global progress against Polio eradication (CDC, 2014).

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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