PolioPlus Responding to the Covid-19 Challenge

A program begun by Rotary is employing thousands of health workers to address the Covid-19 pandemic. The program is the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) which includes Rotary’s PolioPlus program. From the earliest days of polio eradication in the Philippines, the generosity and advocacy of Rotarians and our partners has nearly stopped polio, stopped Ebola from becoming an epidemic in Nigeria and now responds to Covid-19.

Over the next four to six months the polio program is offering its tools, workforce and extensive surveillance network to support countries as they respond. Globally, the polio surveillance network is being trained on Covid case detection, contact tracing, laboratory testing and data management. GPEI is deploying its coordination mechanisms such as emergency operations centers and sharing physical assets like vehicles, computers and mobile phones to combat the pandemic. In Nigeria, an extensive network of polio communication assets including 20,000 volunteer community mobilizers are working across the country to promote handwashing to reduce transmission. In Pakistan, polio staff have sensitized more than 6,000 health workers on Covid-19 and repurposed a helpline originally used for polio related calls to also address Covid questions. The polio surveillance team in Angola is training health care staff on case management of Covid-19. Polio staff in Benin are developing a pandemic preparedness plan for that country. Each day we hear of more deployments of polio staff to address Covid issues in additional countries.

So what about polio itself? The Polio Oversight Board made the hard decision to pause house to house vaccinations knowing that this may lead to an increase in polio cases. Polio surveillance will continue while also supporting Covid surveillance. The GPEI is working to ensure that once it is safe to do so, countries can be supported to rapidly resume polio immunization campaigns. We will have a message in every country that vaccines, including the polio vaccine, stop viruses from attacking children and adults. We must seize the moment to let every village understand that the polio vaccine saves lives.

For over 40 years, Rotarians have never wavered in fulfilling our commitment to the children of the world to end polio. Today, in contributing to PolioPlus we are also addressing this evil Covid-19 pandemic. The goals this year for contributions to PolioPlus have not changed. The opportunity to do good in the world has only increased. If you or your club have not given to PolioPlus lately, today is the day to do so. All funds donated are matched 2 to 1 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. If your District has underutilized District Designated Funds, any allocation is matched 6 to 1 by the Rotary Foundation World Fund and the Gates Foundation. And if you want to know more about how Rotary and the GPEI are addressing Covid-19 while not losing focus on eradicating polio, see

Polioeradication.org

endpolio.org

Yours in Rotary Service,