



Congratulatory message from Polio Chief, UNICEF

Dear friends,

Congratulations! India has completed one full year without recording any cases of polio - a major milestone for the country and for all of us.

I want to personally thank each one of you for your invaluable contribution to this achievement. This would not have been possible without your enthusiasm and tireless efforts.

However, our job is not finished yet. We need to keep up the momentum. Each one of you is an important player in this effort. We are all together making history.

Let us once again vow to continue to do our best to make polio history in India.

Lieven Desomer

Chief - Polio
UNICEF India

One year without any polio cases in India

On 13 January 2012, for the first time ever, India recorded one full year without any cases of polio. This milestone is a great credit to all the social mobilizers, vaccinators and front-line workers who have worked so hard for so long to stop the transmission of polio.

The year 2011 saw unprecedented progress against polio in India, with only one polio case being reported in January from Howrah in West Bengal. A rapid and intense response was launched in high-risk areas of West Bengal and the outbreak was successfully stopped. However, the key to India's success is the fact that, for the time in the history of polio eradication, both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar did not report any cases concurrently for more than a year. UP has now not reported any polio case since April 2010 and Bihar since September 2010.

However, there is no room for complacency. The importation of wild poliovirus from Pakistan into China last year and continuing polio outbreaks in neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan highlights the ongoing threat to India. The only way to maintain a polio-free India is to ensure that all children under five are immunized against polio every time it is offered, both in routine immunization and in every polio round.



Rukhsar (in orange) - the last polio case reported in India in January 2011.

Relaying polio messages during Chhath

An innovative approach was adopted to reach large populations in transit during the recent Chhath festival in Patna, Bihar - a boat decorated with polio flags and colourful banners was hired to relay polio messages and also wish people well on this auspicious occasion.



Polio messages relayed from boats on Chhath

The boat, which set sail from Patna Collectorate and ended its journey in Dighaghat, caught the attention of young and old and was welcomed by waving hands on both sides of the river bank.

DID YOU KNOW ?

- ◆ That India must remain polio-free for a further two years with excellent disease surveillance to be certified polio-free.
- ◆ Only three years ago, in 2009, India had the most number of cases in the world, with 741 out of a total 1604 cases. Only two years ago, in 2010, poliovirus originating in India re-infected seven countries. So we must remain vigilant until eradication is achieved globally!

Global Hand Washing day celebrated across Uttar Pradesh

The SMNet supported Global Hand Washing Day on 15 October, 2011, by helping to organize awareness events in 2,777 schools, madaras and anganwadi centres across 36 districts of Uttar Pradesh. The event, which received wide coverage in the media, offered a rich opportunity for the SMNet to create awareness on sanitation issues in schools, and to motivate children to adopt safe hygiene practices such as handwashing at all critical times.



SMNet mobilizers demonstrate the correct hand washing technique

Amitabh Bachchan launches new Polio Communication Campaign

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Polio Eradication and Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan, launched the new Communication Campaign for polio in Mumbai on December 15, 2011, appealing to parents and caregivers to take advantage of this rare opportunity to “make polio history in India”.

He congratulated the vaccinators, community mobilizers and parents for overcoming multiple challenges and obstacles in the most difficult situations and hard-to-reach areas to protect India’s children against polio. The government, polio programme partners and the media were present at the launch.



Mr Amitabh Bachchan appealed to parents to immunize all children up to five years of age

STAR MOBILIZER



Shabnam counsels young mothers on polio and routine immunization

Shabnam is a CMC from the Loni block in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. A former teacher, Shabnam is very proud of her work with the SMNet that ensures no children are missed from polio immunization. Initially there was resistance due to misconceptions about safety of the vaccine.

Shabnam says: “People would turn me away but I was not demotivated. I saw this as a challenge to be overcome.” She organized community and mothers meetings to allay the doubts and fears of families and to strengthen their confidence in the programme. Her inter-personal communication (IPC) skills ensured parents and caregivers understood all the facts about polio, the risk factors and the importance of routine immunization. Influencers from the community such as teachers, doctors and religious leaders were also brought on board to mobilize caregivers for polio immunization.

Today as a result of Shabnam’s efforts there is no resistance in her area and the routine immunization coverage has also vastly improved.

Sehwag and Richardson join campaign to 'Bowl Out Polio'

Indian opening batsman Virender Sehwag and West Indies Team Manager and legend Richie Richardson joined UNICEF’s ‘Bowl Out Polio’ campaign in Kolkata on November 13. While administering oral polio vaccine to children at a booth, they said: “Make sure your child takes the polio vaccine in each polio campaign up to 5 years of age, so that polio can be wiped off the face of the planet.”



Indian cricketer Virender Sehwag immunizes a child during UNICEF’s ‘Bowl Out Polio’ event

QUOTABLE

“As Goodwill Ambassador for Polio, I feel proud of the remarkable progress achieved this year. But at the same time, I would like to caution that the job is not finished yet. Polio remains a threat everywhere as long as the poliovirus continues to circulate anywhere in the world. We must continue to immunize all children up to 5 years until polio is eradicated in India and globally.”

Amitabh Bachchan

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador

POLIO FACTS

- ◆ In India during National Immunization Days held twice each year, 2.3 million vaccinators go to 209 million houses to immunize 172 million children under five with life-saving oral polio vaccine.
- ◆ Polio cases have decreased by over 99% since the global polio eradication initiative was launched – down from 350,000 cases per year in 1988 to just 650 cases in 2011. Almost a third of the world’s cases last year were in Pakistan.