



# spotlight on health

## Pushing Polio To The Brink Of Eradication

(NAPSA)—To achieve a world free of the crippling disease polio, there's an effort under way to raise \$100 million to match a challenge grant in the same amount from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

That may seem a daunting task, but it can be done with perseverance and hard work, say dedicated members of Rotary clubs. Since launching its landmark PolioPlus program, the volunteer service organization has already contributed nearly \$700 million to the cause, as well as the many volunteer hours logged by Rotary members such as Ann Lee Hussey.

A polio survivor herself, Hussey has volunteered for immunization drives in a half dozen countries in the developing world. Although the polio epidemic may be a distant memory for most Americans—the last case of naturally occurring polio in the United States was in 1979 and cases have been slashed by 99 percent worldwide—it still threatens children in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. And that doesn't sit well with Hussey.

"I don't want any child, anywhere, to go through the suffering that I and thousands of other children experienced," she says emphatically. "Polio is a totally preventable disease and we have the tools to eradicate it right now."

Indeed, for as little as 60 cents worth of oral polio vaccine, a child can be protected for life.

However, a major funding gap now faces the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, of which Rotary is a spearheading partner (along with the World Health Organiza-



Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation/  
Prashant Panjair

### Bill Gates helps prevent polio.

tion, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF). Twenty years of steady progress is at stake and polio—now on the ropes—stands to stage a dangerous comeback unless the funding gap is bridged.

In response to the funding crisis, the organization eagerly accepted the challenge from the Gates Foundation to match, dollar for dollar, the \$100 million grant over three years, providing a much needed \$200 million, all of it dedicated to polio eradication.

Its worldwide membership of 1.2 million men and women—representing about 33,000 clubs in nearly 200 countries—immediately embraced the effort by digging deeper into their own pockets, planning special fundraisers and rallying community support. Anyone who wants to learn more about this historic opportunity to end polio once and for all can visit [www.rotary.org/endpolio](http://www.rotary.org/endpolio).

"As long as polio exists anywhere in the world," says Hussey, "all children remain at risk."