

World Polio Day 2022

Utah Valley University

Lilly Hall Presentation

Thank you. I chose to study Public Health because I am passionate about women's health and the impact proper health education can have on women and children.

On October 15, I had the privilege of attending Utah Rotary's End Polio Now Gala, where President John Germ, Rotary International's past president, spoke about Rotary's role in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and the power one person can make. Through this, I learned the importance of widespread health care and health education.

Polio remains endemic in two countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Until poliovirus is interrupted in these countries, all countries remain at risk. This is especially true of vulnerable countries with weak public health and immunization services and those who travel or trade with endemic countries. In recent years, this has led to 35 "outbreak countries." These countries have stopped indigenous wild poliovirus but are experiencing re-infection. There are also eight key at-risk countries where low levels of immunity and surveillance leave the populations vulnerable to an outbreak. As mentioned, the US joined this list this June with a poliovirus outbreak in New York. Gender roles, norms, and inequalities, along with other factors such as age, race, socioeconomic background, disability, religion, and caste, operate as powerful determinants of health outcomes. There is a direct link between education and the vaccines women and their children receive. According to the Global Polio eradication initiative, an essential part of reaching every child with vaccines in the last remaining polio strongholds is increasing women's participation in immunization activities. Since polio mostly affects children under two, parents or caregivers are the critical decision-makers for allowing a child access to immunization. The type of decisions they make, their power to make decisions, and their available resources to act on those decisions

are all influenced by gender. Often, women lack transportation, money, time, and, unfortunately, in some nations, the “permission” from their “superiors” to receive this vaccine, especially when the immunization teams have male staff. The compounding of social and physical barriers for women in patriarchal societies constrains their capacity to provide health care to their children. Mothers are at the intersection of two conflicting sets of demands; on the one hand, they are seen as responsible for the child’s care, including health; on the other hand, they may lack the resources and autonomy to seek out health care. Mothers who perceive that spousal permission is required for their child’s immunization are less likely to immunize their child fully.

It isn’t just polio eradication that is negatively impacted by social and physical barriers, laws surrounding sex education also negatively affect these women, even within the United States. Currently, only 18 states require educators to share information on birth control, only 13 states require sex education to be medically accurate, and only 37 states require sex education through schools. Not only is health education important but it is essential for teens to be equipped with the power knowledge can bring. A lack of education is forcing teens to seek this information from pornography, social media, and friends. These resources are not accurate nor a realistic representation. Rural mountainous regions, both locally and globally, are especially affected by this lack of information. Until accurate information and resources are given to these areas, healthcare and vaccination rates will continue to be inefficient.

Until Polio has been completely eradicated, all countries remain at risk. The best way for countries to minimize the risk and consequences of polio infection is to maintain strong population immunity levels through high vaccination coverage and strong disease surveillance to detect and respond to polio rapidly.

I want to thank all our Orem-Lindon Rotarians. Without your support and the contribution of past Rotarians, Polio would not be what it is today. Your efforts and dedication is the heart of what Rotary International is and truly embodies Rotary's motto of "Service above one's self." As students, and future leaders, educators, and healthcare workers, we have the opportunity to bring these causes to the forefront, now and in the future.

Thank you