

MEDIA AVAILABILITY

IMMUNIZE CANADA SUPPORTS GLOBAL FIGHT TO END POLIO

23 October 2019, Ottawa, ON — October 24th is World Polio Day, and Immunize Canada wants to remind Canadians of the importance of immunization. Several vaccination experts and a polio survivor are available to speak with the media.

Many Canadians believe that polio has been eliminated and is a forgotten disease, but the reality is very different. Polio still exists in Pakistan and Afghanistan and until the disease is completely eradicated, the world's children are at risk.

Polio is a highly contagious virus that can spread from person to person and attack the infected person's brain, leading to paralysis. For thousands of polio survivors, the disease is very much part of their lives. Safia Ibrahim is one of those survivors and a Special Polio Representative for UNICEF Canada.

"I contracted the polio virus in Somalia. I am partially paralyzed from the waist down. I crawled on my hands and knees until I was 6 years old. Two years later I came to Canada as a refugee and received medical treatment. I was fitted for a leg brace and given forearm crutches, which I still use today when walking long distances."

A polio vaccine was introduced in 1955, and with it a childhood immunization program across Canada. The last case of wild poliovirus occurred in 1977, and in 1994 the World Health Organization (WHO) certified Canada as free of wild poliovirus. The Government of Canada was one of the first countries to support the creation of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1987, and to this day remains a global champion for polio eradication.

GPEI is a partnership between UNICEF, WHO, Rotary International, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It is focused on the complete eradication of all forms of polio to ensure no child is affected. Thanks to the GPEI, 2.5 billion children around the world have been immunized. That means more than 10 million people who would otherwise have been paralyzed are walking today.

"Polio is a preventable disease. We have gone from 350,000 cases in 1988 to only 33 cases reported in 2018. But we must get to zero to ensure no more children will spend the rest of their lives paying the price for the world's inaction," said Ibrahim.

There is no cure for polio. The only effective tool we have against the disease is immunization.

To schedule an interview with a vaccination expert, please contact:

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Immunize Canada is a national coalition with a specific interest in promoting the understanding and use of vaccines as recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).