



District 6080 Rotarians,

Youth Services is the Rotary theme for the month of May. I challenged clubs to increase their youth services this Rotary year, and many of you have responded. I thank you for your success in this area and encourage clubs to continue to do more in the coming year.

Interact Clubs enable high school and middle school students to learn leadership skills and provide service to their community and beyond. District 6080 clubs sponsor several successful Interact Clubs. If your club does not sponsor an Interact Club, consider organizing one. Teresa Waggoner, District Interact Chair, can help with the organization.

If your club sponsors an Interact Club, support it. Have members attend their meetings. Participate in their service projects and fundraisers. Ask Interactors to participate in your club's service projects.

Three Missouri districts form Missouri Rotary Youth Leadership Awards. They sponsor the Missouri RYLA Academy, a four-day, three-night leadership and service academy for rising high school sophomores, juniors and seniors, with sessions in June and July at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg. Rotary clubs sponsor the students and pay the fee (currently \$600 per student). This summer's registration deadline has passed, but start planning for the summer of 2026 by talking with school counselors and identifying students. For assistance, contact Paula Montgomery or Miki McKee Koelsch at missouriryla@gmail.com.

It's time to start recruiting Rotary Youth Exchange students to study abroad during the 2026-27 school year. It's a great way for students to learn another culture and another language, to broaden their horizons and to become more mature and independent. Presentations at high schools are one good way to recruit adventurous students; District Youth Exchange Committee members can help. Contact Kit Freudenburg for assistance. District 6080 is also offering short-term exchanges during the summer of 2026 - either a camp-type experience or a stay with a family in another country for three to five weeks. Either is a great option for a student not willing to commit to a year. Go to rotariyyouthexchange6080.org for more information.

Let's keep working hard to involve youth in District 6080 in Rotary activities!

Rowland Geddie, District Governor 2024-25
Rotary Club of Springfield Sunrise



Send your news items and photos to District Secretary Mary Ann Beahon at beahon.rotary@gmail.com

ROTARY 6080

WONDERLAND *Camp*

ESTABLISHED 1969

WORK DAY 2025 MAY 3
9AM - 3PM



LUNCH IS PROVIDED!

To thank you for your time spent, we will be providing a light lunch.



HELP US PREP FOR SUMMER.

During this time, you will help us prepare for the upcoming summer. Things that you will be doing include: power washing, painting, mulching and tidying up camp in preparation of our Open House on May 17th.



WHAT TO BRING?

If you are looking for items to donate, we could use: individual food items (mac and cheese, beefaroni, fruit snacks, granola bars, chips, Gatorade, etc.), ibuprofen, Tylenol, Pepto Bismol, s'more supplies, puzzles with less than 100 pieces, coloring books, and word searches!

ABOUT WONDERLAND



18591 Miller Cir, Rocky Mount MO



(573) 392- 1000



www.wonderlandcamp.org



Rotarian to Ride 2,100 Miles to Support Polio Plus



A Rotarian from St. Louis plans to ride a bicycle 2,100 miles in support of the organization's work to eradicate polio and protect the world's children from this devastating disease. His trip will take him through Missouri.

Ralph Zuke (pronounced zoo-key), 58, left St. Louis early on April 28, pulling a rickshaw behind his bicycle. He will travel the Katy Trail through Missouri, with stops in Washington, Portland, Columbia, Clifton City and Warrensburg. In addition to Missouri, Zuke's travels will take him through Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana and into Canada. His final destination is Calgary, Alberta, Canada, site of this year's Rotary International Convention, which starts June 21.

A Rotarian for 17 years, Zuke is a member of St. Louis Civilians, a satellite club of St. Louis Rotary, and the District Governor-elect of Rotary District 6060. Riding his bicycle/rickshaw combination to Rotary International conventions is nothing new to him--he rode 702 miles to the convention in Toronto in 2018 and 904 miles to Houston in 2022.

His excursions help raise awareness and funds for Polio Plus. Through sponsorships and donations, as well as giving people rides in the rickshaw, he has raised over \$60,000. If you'd like to make a donation, scan the QR code on the right.



Honoring Young Leaders During Youth Service Month



The William Woods University Rotaract Club took home the Community Impact Award at the university's Green Carpet Awards. Their dedication to service this year has truly made a difference. They started the academic year reading to Head Start during Rotary's Literacy Month. They held a Teddy Bear Toss at a basketball game and donated the stuffed animals to the Super Sam Foundation for children with cancer. The club held a campus-wide event to decorate duffle bags for foster children through CASA. They also hosted a number of speakers from non-profit organizations to create awareness on campus.

Buffalo Rotarians are grateful for this group of young people and the Buffalo High School Interact (right). They show up to help Rotary with service projects and fundraisers. If you are looking for a reason to have hope for the future of our world, just take a look at the local youth.



Rotary Club of Rolla (left) is a proud supporter of the Rolla Technical Institute DECA Students. Ten students qualified for the DECA International Competition in Orlando, Florida.

Rotary's 'Service Above Self' Takes Many Forms

Jefferson City West Rotary held a special hands-on service project during a Friday meeting, led by member Grace Schnieders. Together, they made several tie blankets to donate to Miracles for Margaret, a nonprofit dedicated to comforting children facing serious health challenges. These blankets will be delivered to MU Children's Hospital and other care centers, bringing warmth and a sense of security to children in need. It was a heartfelt way to honor the legacy of Margaret Romph, whose story inspired the foundation's mission. Learn more at: miracles4margaret.org



The Rotary Club of Springfield volunteered at CrossLines food pantry on April 9.

The Rotary Club of Fulton collaborated with the Kingdom of Callaway Historical Society (KCHS) to identify groups of migrants that have made a significant positive impact on the county

and to develop a traveling display for the historical society. The project, "Peace Builder: Getting to Know Your Neighbors in Callaway County," hopes to address misunderstandings about the role migrants play in economic and social changes in an area in hopes of building civility toward new people and better communication among diverse members in the community.



Rotarians and KCHS members meet to review their Peace Builder plans.



Susan Krumm, a past president of Fulton Rotary and president of the Kingdom of Callaway Historical Society board, explains the project.



Columbia South Rotary (left and below) joined the community for the 2025 CleanUp Columbia on April 12.

Columbia Metro Rotarians (right) also participated in CleanUp Columbia.



Rotary Club of Columbia members (right) worked at "Welcome Home Inc." to cook a meal and serve about 24 veterans. "Welcome Home Inc." provides transitional and emergency shelter, permanent housing, employment assistance, and wrap-around supportive services to at-risk and homeless Veterans.





Belton-Raymore Rotary members volunteered to serve meals at Belton School District's annual Spring Senior Citizen luncheon.

Belton-Raymore

Rotary members also helped Belton Parks and Recreation and Missouri Stream Teams with a stream clean-up at Wallace Park in Belton. They also got to learn about native Missouri plants and water insects.



Jefferson City Evening Rotary Easter bunnies gathered at Rotarian Dottie Dallmeyer's home to help stuff Easter eggs for her upcoming annual Easter Egg Hunt. Hundreds of eggs are filled with candy, stickers and trinkets just ready for a rousing hunt.

Rotary Club of Rolla Lunch sponsored the Rolla Public Schools CORE (Champions of Rolla Education) luncheon and served lunch to students and teachers on April 10.



Rotary Club of Springfield (right) delivered \$600 worth of snacks to Weaver Elementary School to support students during their upcoming MAP Testing.



Columbia Metro Rotary is proud to have served as a Partner in Education with these amazing preschool teachers (left) for over 22 years.

Donations from Rotary Clubs Help Communities

Belton-Raymore Rotary presented a \$5,000 donation to the Raymore-Peculiar Public School Foundation. The funds were raised during the 2024 golf tournament.

Raymore-Peculiar Public School Foundation Board Members Ruth Johnson and Andrea Cox with Jodie Huston (Executive Director of the Foundation and Rotary member), Rotary Treasurer Jeff Wayman and Rotary President Joe Warren.



Branson Daybreakers Rotary supported Newborns in Need with a \$1,000 donation, presented to Pam Detten. This organization provides essential items like clothing, blankets and diapers to newborns, ensuring they have a healthy and comfortable start in life.

Fayette Rotary President Linda Lembke presented a "Happy Can" check for \$100 to Jenny Vroman (right) to be used by the Fayette Athletic Boosters. She also presented a "Happy Can" check for \$100 to Jocelyn Hutchinson (far right) to be used by PAWS, Pet Adoption and Welfare Service.



Columbia South Rotarians do a "silly shot" with the Missouri Highsteppers, recipient of the club's District Simplified Grant this year. New uniforms, drums, and a community meal--that's the Rotary spirit in action!

Clinton Rotary donated several cases of tissues to schools in the Clinton School District. Krystal Smith makes one of the deliveries.



Springfield Metro Rotary sponsored the Parkview Empowerment Night.



Springfield Rotary hosted a donation drive to support Good Dads, a program that empowers fathers through education and community. They collected a number of suits, shirts, shoes, belts and ties for the organization. In addition, they received \$545, which can be used to purchase socks and underwear for the men. As part of their graduation ceremonies, Good Dads provides each dad with a gently used suit, shirt, tie, belt, shoes and essential items like new underwear and socks. Last November they had a large graduating class, so Rotarians stepped up to help replenish their inventory.



Fundraising: a Crucial Part of Community Service



Buffalo Rotary held a fish sandwich fundraiser at the Dallas County YMCA. The funds raised will help fund many service projects.



Clinton Rotary once again hosted the cake auction for Henry County Memory Fund. This fundraiser began many years ago and was named after fellow Rotarian, Connie Austin, after she passed. Rotary raised \$1,340 towards this much-needed support group.



Lake Ozark Daybreak Rotary sponsored Winterfest, an annual cornerstone charitable event in the Lake of the Ozarks community. It has consistently raised nearly \$100,000 annually and benefits more than 40 local charities and organizations. The Winterfest 2025 event was held at the Lodge of Four Seasons March 29.



Fulton Rotary again paid tribute to one of its long-time members with a golf tournament in his honor April 14. Charlie James, 87, a former outfielder for the St. Louis Cardinals, who played in the 1964 World Series, has been a member of Fulton Rotary for more than 50 years



Fulton Rotary President Jacque Cowherd and his wife Karen visit with Bob Hansen and Charlie James.



Stephanie Rademan, chair of the golf tournament, starts the tournament with Charlie James.

and is a two-time past president. He's also an avid golfer. The tournament and online auction raised nearly \$10,000.



Rotarian John Bell prepares to play.



Bob Sterner and Sherry McCarthy serve lunch.



Christina Richey gets the beverage cart ready.



Former KOMU-TV news anchor Jim Riek, who plays golf six days a week, with Stephanie Rademan and Charlie James.

District 6080 Rotarians Take "Rotary On the Road"

The Rotary clubs of Springfield, Springfield Southeast and Springfield Metro took "Rotary On the Road" and met at Crosslines Community Outreach April 22 to celebrate the unveiling of their new refrigerated truck, made possible through the clubs' combined District Simplified Grant dollars. Crosslines works to meet basic needs and help the community move from scarcity to security.



Columbia South Rotarians enjoyed a tour at Shops @Sharp End and a happy hour.



2ND ANNUAL BUTLER ROTARY CLUB GOLF TOURNAMENT 4 MAN SCRAMBLE

SUNDAY, MAY 4TH, 2025

CART RENTAL \$30
MULLIGANS \$20
LUNCH PROVIDED
BUTLER COUNTRY CLUB
10:00 AM TEE TIME

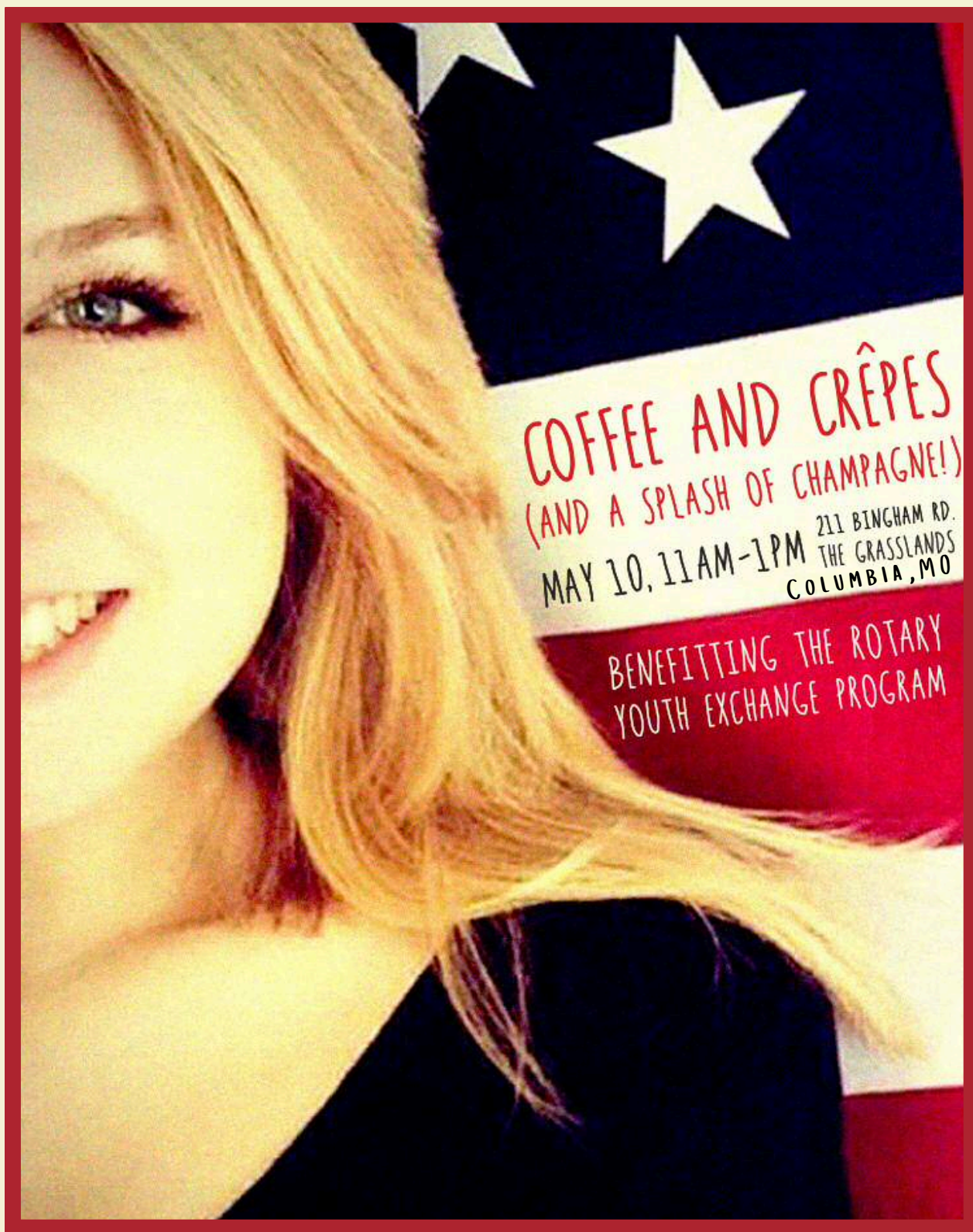
\$200/Team

For more information, contact:
David Hilgenberg 816-352-1431
Justin Smith 660-227-9773



Proceeds go to fund local scholarships

COME JOIN US FOR COFFEE AND CRÊPES



Saturday, May 10, 11am-1pm in the Grasslands, 211 Bingham Rd. Drive through to pick up your crêpes, or join us in the driveway café!

All donations are tax deductible.

Elizabeth J.
UPTON
FOUNDATION

Spaghetti Dinner

May, 4th 2025

5:00 pm to 7:30 pm



Rotary
Rolla Breakfast Club



Di Trapani's
400 E 6th St
Rolla, MO 54401



Sunday, May 4th, 2025
5:00 pm to 7:30 pm

\$15.00

All proceeds support scholarships for local students.

Menu

- Di Trapani's Signature Salad*
- Spaghetti with Meat Sauce
- Garlic Bread
- Ice Cream
- Ice Tea / Water
- Full Bar Available

Children 5 years old and under, eat free.

Tickets are available from any
Breakfast Club Rotarian or at the door.

DINE-IN OR TAKE-OUT

Food prepared and served by Rolla
Breakfast Club Rotarians.

Cash or debit / credit cards accepted.



The Rolla Breakfast Rotary Club



@rolla_breakfast_rotary_club

NPR Asks: Could Polio be Poised for a Comeback?



APRIL 16, 2025 7:14 AM ET By [Betsy Joles](#), [Ruchi Kumar](#)



A health worker in Karachi administers polio drops — the oral vaccine — on February 3, the first day of a nationwide polio vaccination campaign. The country, one of only two where wild polio circulates, has seen a rise in cases due to issues with vaccination campaigns. Asif Hassan/AFP via Getty Images

The world is so close to wiping out polio. But in 2025, there are signs that the virus is not quite ready to go the way of smallpox — the only disease eradicated by humans.

Two countries are seeing an increase in cases caused by the wild polio virus, which can cause paralysis and even death, particularly in infants and young children.

And the cuts in USAID contracts that support polio vaccination raise concern that other countries will see a resurgence as well.

Even with in-country vaccination campaigns and global aid, Pakistan and Afghanistan have so far [been unable to stop transmission of the disease](#). In 2024, Pakistan's numbers spiked to 74 while Afghanistan saw 24 recorded

polio cases. So far this year, Pakistan has reported 6 cases and Afghanistan has reported 1. These new cases are tied to disruptions in ongoing vaccine campaigns.

Global health officials say there's real concern that those numbers could balloon and that polio could reemerge in other countries as well in the wake of the dismantling of USAID. The potential for damage is quantified in a [series of memos](#) drafted by Nicholas Enrich, the acting assistant administrator for global health at USAID, and obtained by the press, including NPR. Enrich estimates how many people would possibly become sick and die if the pause in U.S. aid continues. He projected an additional 200,000 cases of polio that cause paralysis each year and hundreds of millions of infections overall.

"The sudden cuts to U.S. funding are also affecting efforts to eradicate polio," said director general of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in mid-March.

In Kenya, for example, the International Rescue Committee was part of a team doing polio vaccinations along with the Ministry of Health and World Vision. Much of that work was paid for by USAID.

"That actually was the first [of our USAID projects] to shut down on the 31st of January," says Mohamed El Montassir Hussein, country director for the International Rescue Committee in Kenya. "Currently IRC's support for polio vaccination in remote areas has stopped [because of the halt in U.S. funding] and future support is in question. The Ministry of Health vaccination efforts, though greatly impacted, continues."

As for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the numbers there, while relatively low, raise the question: Why does the wild virus persist in these two countries when it's been eradicated from [the rest of the world since 2020](#)? (Other countries have experienced cases of vaccine-derived polio, which can occur when the weakened virus in the oral vaccine mutates and regains its ability to cause paralysis).

Here is a look at what is happening in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Why Pakistan is seeing a resurgence

Usman Ali, a 2-year-old, is one of 74 children in five Pakistani provinces known to have contracted polio in 2024. He is now experiencing partial paralysis.

"[I fear] my youngest son will not be able to walk or play for the rest of his life," says his mother, Naik Margha.

Ali lives in Balochistan province, bordering Afghanistan. When polio workers came door-to-door in late April last year in his village of simple mud and brick houses, the child had a fever. His parents worried the vaccine would make his illness worse, so they refused it. They asked polio workers to mark his finger with purple ink anyway to make it look like he'd been vaccinated.

Ali had fevers on and off for several weeks, and in June, began having trouble walking. His parents rushed him to a private clinic for treatment. When a later test of his stool sample came back positive for polio, they realized it was paralysis and could be permanent. Since then, Ali has recovered somewhat but still has partial paralysis in one leg.

Ali's community is comprised of seasonal migrants who travel yearly to herd their sheep, mostly in the plains of neighboring Punjab province. Their village lacks toilets and sanitation, and people defecate in the open, which health officials say puts around 2,000 other children at risk of contracting polio, which can be spread by contact with human waste.

"This is a vulnerable community. They can easily carry the virus from one place to another place," says Saheedullah Lawoon, a polio community communication officer in the district.

Polio has surged despite Pakistan's extensive surveillance program and repeated door-to-door vaccination campaigns, highlighting shortcomings in the country's polio program. Pakistan has struggled to maintain the necessary high rates of immunization while combating vaccine fatigue.

To be optimally protected from polio, health care experts recommend that children in Pakistan receive two doses of the injectable vaccine and at least three doses of the oral — an aggressive course aimed at interrupting transmission. In 2023, only 84% of the country's eligible children received two doses of the injectable vaccine, according to World Health Organization and UNICEF estimates shared by the Pakistan Polio Programme, while 86% of children received three doses of the oral vaccine during routine immunization.

"We have higher coverage in Punjab overall, but very low coverage in Balochistan, parts of Karachi, parts of South Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, parts of Balochistan and even Southern Punjab," says Dr. Hamid Jafari, the WHO director of polio eradication for the region. "[There is] huge provincial variation. Punjab is 60% of the country, so it can skew the national average."

Vaccination rates during door-to-door drives can surpass 90%, according to Pakistan Polio Programme data, but these campaigns only offer the oral vaccine. To receive the injectable vaccine, parents must travel to designated facilities. The injectable vaccine is harder to administer and requires trained health workers and sanitary conditions. The result is that some children in Pakistan only receive the oral vaccine, while some aren't vaccinated at all.

More than half of the polio cases in Pakistan last year were from children who hadn't received a single dose of either version of the vaccines. The other 45% were children who had received the oral polio

vaccine, sometimes up to seven times, according to case data. Experts say receiving that many doses is not dangerous for a child. Pakistan's Polio Programme says what's important is that every child is vaccinated during each vaccine campaign to maintain their immunity.

Pakistan's polio eradication program was started in 1994 and made strides early on to significantly reduce the number of polio cases in the country, which used to be in the tens of thousands. Between 1994 and 2013, the country managed to reduce the average number of annual cases by around 96%, [from 2,635 to 93](#). Case numbers seesawed in the following years before reaching an all-time low in 2021, when Pakistan recorded only one infection.

Although cases have fluctuated in the past, experts say last year's increase was particularly alarming. Zulfiqar Bhutta, founding director of The Institute for Global Health and Development at the Aga Khan University in Karachi, says there's also not one reason why.

"It isn't one single factor that leads to polio exacerbations, ups and downs in Pakistan. It's always a combination," he says.

Bhutta attributes the spike in part to laxity with door-to-door vaccination campaigns. In some cases parents or health workers will mark a child's finger who hasn't been vaccinated, which he attributes to fatigue among health workers under pressure to hit vaccination targets and exhausted from dealing with uncooperative parents. He also cites inadequate supervision of vaccine workers on the ground.

Then there's vaccine distrust — still a problem in parts of Pakistan and in neighboring Afghanistan. Some think the vaccine will affect fertility, while others believe vaccines are part of a Western conspiracy. The distrust of aid workers grew after the [CIA operated under the guise of a vaccine campaign](#) to search for Osama Bin Laden in 2011.

Polio workers also struggle to access certain areas because of conflict and security risks. In the past decade, they've become the target of militant groups who accuse them of being government spies or agents of the West.

In some cases, parents refuse vaccines for their children because they've grown tired of repeat visits by polio workers, who are required to give oral polio drops during each vaccination campaign to every child under the age of 5 — including those who've received them multiple times before.

According to a September 2024 report by the Independent Monitoring Board of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, over four million Pakistani children missed being vaccinated last year.

Polio spreads quickly within unvaccinated communities, and mobile populations carry the virus from one part of the country to the next. People also bring it with them across the border from neighboring Afghanistan.

In the past, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have each come close to eradicating the virus, says Dr. Jafari of WHO. But the two nations' vaccine campaigns didn't align, so pockets of polio can persist and spread between the countries.

"It's been very difficult to find a time period where the progress was well synchronized so that they both would interrupt transmission at the same time," he says. "Polio is an epidemic-prone disease. That means that if you don't interrupt transmission, it resurges after every few years."

A number of recent cases involve children who avoided severe paralysis, thanks to some level of protection from oral vaccines, says Zia Ur Rehman, spokesperson for the Pakistan Polio Eradication

Programme. "That is very encouraging. And it shows that there is always a benefit of repeated vaccination."

Pakistan held its first vaccination drive of the year in early February in an attempt to ensure that all children under age 5 have received at least one dose of the oral vaccine, with the goal of eventually achieving herd immunity. This should occur with polio when around 80% of the population is vaccinated, although Pakistan presents a special challenge.

There's no clear threshold for herd immunity in Pakistan, according to WHO's Hamid Jafari. "There isn't just one figure that we can go with in terms of what level of immunity do you need to stop transmission." He said the 80% rate might be an average figure for countries with better sanitation and less population density, but in South Asia, higher vaccination rates are needed to interrupt transmission.

The campaign aimed to reach about 45 million children around the country. According to Pakistan's Polio Programme, health workers vaccinated about 200,000 fewer children than the target, though it's difficult to independently verify. The number of children nationwide who didn't receive the vaccine because family members refused was around 66,000, according to Pakistan Polio Programme data. The next countrywide vaccination campaign is set to take place in April.

Meanwhile, the virus has been detected in sewage samples around the country this year, including in Punjab province, home to around half of Pakistan's children. Before a case was confirmed there last year, the province had been without a case of polio since 2020. Punjab has had one polio case so far in 2025.

Bhutta said the widespread circulation of the virus means the situation could quickly spiral into something much worse.

"This is like sitting on the top of a volcano. This can erupt anytime."

Changes in vaccination strategy leave some children behind in Afghanistan

A few months ago, a 35-year-old Afghan businessman named Mohammad noticed that his youngest son's hand looked extremely thin and was bending at an unnatural angle. A few tests later, he and his wife's worst fears were confirmed: "We were told he was infected with the polio virus," he tells NPR. "We missed his vaccines, and now a part of his hand is paralyzed."

Mohammad, who requested his full name be withheld fearing reprisal for criticizing the Taliban government, blames his son's condition on the decision to suspend door-to-door vaccination campaigns.

In August 2024, the Taliban announced a temporary suspension of [door-to-door vaccination campaigns across the country](#). No official reason was provided; however, health workers familiar with the situation said that the ban was a result of suspicion of Western aid and the Taliban's restrictions placed on women workers, who aren't allowed to travel without a male legal guardian.



An Afghan health worker administers polio vaccine drops to a child during a polio vaccination campaign in Kandahar on December 23, 2024. The Taliban suspended door-to-door campaigns. Sanaullah Seiam/AFP via Getty Images

"They stopped the health workers from coming to the communities, and instead moved the vaccinations to the local mosques," Mohammad says.

Mohammad, who has four other children who are vaccinated and healthy, says that campaign suspensions coupled with the Taliban restrictions made it hard for his family to get the children vaccinated.

"As a sole breadwinner, I travel a lot for work, and the women in the family can't just walk to the local mosque to get vaccines," he says, referring to the Taliban's ban on women's movement.

Although the number of polio cases in Afghanistan is significantly less than in Pakistan, the spike was "extremely high" in 2024, according to health officials -- 24 cases compared to just six the previous year.

"The main reason for this increase is the poor quality of vaccination campaigns, particularly the lack of house-to-house distribution system which has been very successful in the past," says an Afghan health official who requested anonymity, fearing Taliban backlash.

The spread is alarming, he says.

While Pakistan and Afghanistan remain the only countries that have failed to eliminate the polio virus, Afghanistan had made some progress in reducing cases in recent years.

However, the various Taliban groups in the region have long held suspicions that the door-to-door vaccination programs involving Western aid might be used to spy on communities.

As a result, for many years during its war with the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the Taliban refused to allow immunization campaigns in areas they controlled. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, health workers had hoped they could finally be allowed access to previously unreachable parts of the country.

Instead, the Taliban expanded their ban across the country.

Vaccination drives have also been hampered by the Taliban's successive bans on women's employment across various sectors, including in NGOs and development work.



Children wait to receive polio vaccination in Nangarhar province, east Afghanistan, in November 2024 — part of a three-day campaign kicked off in 11 out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces that month, according to the Ministry of Public Health. Sharafat Zaman Amarkhail, the ministry's spokesperson, said 5.3 million children under age 5 were expected to receive vaccine doses during the campaign. Aimal Zahir/Xinhua via Getty Images

"Women are crucial to such campaigns because in a conservative country like Afghanistan they would be more welcome by families and communities with women and children, unlike the men, which allows them to not only provide vaccines and raise awareness but is also crucial to reporting some of the cases," the health official explains.

Instead, he says, the remaining, mostly male, health workers have been advised by the Taliban to conduct campaigns in mosques across the country, where families are expected to bring their children for doses.

"This leaves many children unvaccinated since most families aren't aware or proactive about

getting vaccines," the health official says, adding that for the vaccines to be successful, at least 95% of children under the age of 5 need to be covered during each campaign.

"For most families experiencing poverty, polio vaccine is not a priority," he points out. According to [U.N. estimates](#), more than half the Afghan population relied on humanitarian assistance in 2024 from charities like the U.N.'s World Food Programme.

And in densely packed areas with limited sanitation, many children are already struggling with health issues that make them more vulnerable to polio.

"Immunity among children is low and there are other diseases like diarrhea, malnutrition that is also spreading, alongside a lack of hygiene and sanitation which makes it a deadly combination," he says. Afghan health workers say they are continuing to advocate, alongside international organizations, to resume door-to-door campaigns. In the meantime, health care workers are encouraging parents to bring their children to local vaccination centers.

"If we don't act now, we may be faced with many tragic cases across the region, because infections don't see borders and can spread fast," the health official warns.

For Mohammad's youngest son, though, it might already be too late.

"All my children except the little one were vaccinated at home. I appeal to the [village] elders to [negotiate with the officials to] resume the door-to-door vaccinations again because not every family can travel to a public space and get the vaccines," he says. "It is not a matter of just my family or province, we are talking million of innocent children who are at risk."

Betsy Joles is a journalist based in Pakistan.

Ruchi Kumar is a journalist who reports on conflict, politics, development and culture in India and Afghanistan. She can be found on X at [@RuchiKumar](#)