

## **Lions Clubs International Foundation: Fighting Measles at the Grassroots Level**

Measles is a highly contagious disease. The virus spreads quickly through coughing and sneezing. When one person has measles, 90 percent of the people they come into close contact with will become infected if they are not already immune. Measles immunity comes through either previously being vaccinated against the disease or through previously contracting it.

Measles remains a heavy public health burden in developing countries where parents do not have access to immunization services that could protect their children from the disease. Factors such as poverty, poor health systems and a lack of information make it difficult for families to secure preventative medical care.

Every day, 400 people die from measles. That's more than 145,000 per year and more than one million in 10 years. It is the leading cause of death for children under the age of five. Those who so survive are at risk of severe complications, which may include pneumonia, blindness, diarrhea and encephalitis.

In 2010, the Measles Initiative and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation approached Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) with the idea of a partnership that would engage Lions worldwide in the fight against measles. The Measles Initiative, now known as the Measles & Rubella Initiative (M&RI), is a coalition of international partners dedicated to the elimination of measles and rubella. The Gates Foundation has a division dedicated to using science and technology to save lives in developing countries.

According to its website ([www.measlesrubellainitiative.org](http://www.measlesrubellainitiative.org)), "the M&RI aims to reach the measles and rubella elimination goals of the Global Vaccine Action Plan by supporting countries to raise coverage of measles, rubella and other vaccines; fund, plan, implement and monitor quality supplementary campaigns; investigate outbreaks and provide technical and financial support for effective outbreak response, propose and participate in solutions to strengthen immunization delivery; and support a global laboratory network for measles and rubella."

As of 2002, measles has been eliminated from the Americas and, with continued support, M&RI efforts will end the disease in Africa and India by 2020. Rubella was eliminated from the Americas in 2015.

Lions' began in 2010, when LCIF received an initial grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help fight measles within four specific countries: Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria. In a survey of nearly 1,700 Lions before the pilot program began, 90 percent of Lions expressed support for the Lions Measles Initiative, and 90 percent of Lions indicated personal motivation to contribute to the program. Comments included: "This is an amazing opportunity to help eradicate a disease!" and "Measles affects children and sight, so it's a logical extension of what we already do."

Lions involved in the pilot initiative focused their efforts in three main areas: (1) advocacy at the local, regional and national levels; (2) direct involvement in social marketing and mobilization; and (3) financial support. The efforts by Lions, local healthcare professionals and the Measles

Initiative partners were tremendously successful, resulting in 41 million children being vaccinated within these four countries.

Because of the success of the pilot initiative and the role Lions serve within communities around the world, the Gates Foundation awarded LCIF a US\$5 million challenge grant in October 2011. Lions and LCIF were asked to match this funding with US\$10 million, providing a total of US\$15 million for the fight against measles. Lions met this challenge in October 2012, even more quickly than anticipated. Those funds directly supported the vaccination of 15 million children.

In addition to providing financial support, Lion members began actively supporting vaccination campaigns within several countries, including Cameroon, Haiti, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda and Zambia. Lions within the pilot areas continued their advocacy efforts and Lions clubs within many of the measles priority countries actively began planning for upcoming campaigns. This eventually led to the creation of the One Shot, One Life: Lions Measles Initiative.

Perhaps Lions' biggest contribution to the fight against measles and rubella comes in the form of social mobilization. M&RI partners provide technical assistance, but Lions live in and serve the communities at risk; they are the "boots on the ground."

Around the world, Lions are on the ground actively working to stop the spread of measles. Lions know their communities, and they know how to make an impact in those communities. Local Lions actively engage in social mobilization and advocacy to raise awareness about the dangers of measles and the benefits of vaccines. They go door-to-door, speaking to the parents of young children and educating them. Lions host parades and purchase radio advertisements to promote vaccination campaigns. They canvas their neighborhoods, affixing posters and passing out flyers. They speak to local and national officials, community members and clergy to increase the number of vaccination advocates in their areas, and work with our partners to reach even the most remote areas.

Lions and their partners form a global network focused on ending measles and rubella. Lions Clubs International (LCI) is deploying its network of 1.4 million members to raise US\$30 million and to improve access to vaccines through Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, a public-private partnership whose mission is to save children's lives and protect people's health by increasing access to immunization in the world's poorest countries. The funds raised by Lions will be matched by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Gates Foundation for a total of US\$60 million by 2017, LCI's centennial anniversary, to support Gavi's measles and rubella programs.

The partnership makes Lions Clubs the largest member of the Gavi Matching Fund, which now has secured more than US\$145 million in private sector gifts and donor matches.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), measles deaths have been reduced by 71% since 2001. Gavi and Lions clubs have worked with the Measles & Rubella Initiative to support this reduction. Recent experience shows that failure to vaccinate enough children against measles can result in serious outbreaks. As a result, the Gavi-Lions Clubs partnership will include support

of routine immunization and strengthening health systems going forward. By 2020, more than 700 million children in 49 countries are expected to be immunized against measles and rubella.

### Malawi

In November 2013, Lions and Leos from five clubs in Malawi supported the national measles immunization campaign, which targeted two million children throughout the country. Lions sponsored public announcements and volunteered at vaccination sites throughout the five-day campaign.

*“We will always be indebted to you Lions for your selfless spirit and supplements the government’s efforts to serve people. Thank you for being part of the measles initiative. My government greatly appreciates this good work.”*

*-Catherine Gotani Hara, Minister of Health, Malawi*

### Botswana

In November 2013, Lions in Botswana helped the country’s Ministry of Health with a five-day campaign to reach at least 95 percent of children under five years old with measles vaccinations, Vitamin A supplements and deworming pills. Lions went door-to-door encouraging mothers to vaccinate their children. Lions also helped fund a bus to bring families from remote areas to villages to be vaccinated and toured towns to publicize the importance of vaccines.

*“The team here was absolutely great. They really took ownership of mobilizing people for the campaign, and as a government with limited resources, the extra mile that we were able to go with the vaccinations was really a lot to do with the Lions clubs.*

*-Shenaaz El Halabii, deputy permanent secretary, Botswana Ministry of Health*

### Facts about Measles\*

1. About 400 people die from measles every day, or about 16 every hour.
2. In 2013, about 84% of the world's children received one dose of measles vaccine by their first birthday through routine health services – up from 73% in 2000.
3. Between 2000 and 2013, measles vaccination prevented an estimated 15.6 million deaths making the measles vaccine one of the best buys in public health.
4. Most measles-related deaths are caused by complications, which can include blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhea and related dehydration, ear infections, or severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia.
5. All children in developing countries diagnosed with measles should receive two doses of vitamin A supplements, given 24 hours apart. This treatment restores low vitamin A levels during measles that occur even in well-nourished children and can help prevent eye damage and blindness. Vitamin A supplements have been shown to reduce the number of deaths from measles by 50%.

\*World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/>