



PRESS RELEASE

Lions Clubs International Foundation Supports the Measles Initiative with Grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

OAK BROOK, IL, USA, July 26, 2010 – Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) today announced it will support a world-wide effort spearheaded by the Measles Initiative to protect children from measles and strengthen routine immunization services. Four African countries have been chosen for a special Lions-Measles Initiative pilot program, which is funded in part by a grant to LCIF from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"Lions have always been committed to saving sight at all levels in communities," said Eberhard J. Wirfs, Chairperson of Lions Clubs International Foundation. "We are now working to eliminate the presence of measles in countries where children still die needlessly from a disease that is easily preventable by an inexpensive, safe and highly effective vaccine."

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth and throat of infected persons. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), during 2001-2008, global measles mortality declined by 78 percent, from an estimated 733,000 deaths in 2000 to 164,000 in 2008, but the reduction in measles mortality has been leveling off since 2007. Although vaccinations are readily available in developed countries, the disease remains a heavy public health burden in the developing world. The disease is also a major cause of preventable blindness, particularly among children, affecting the same underserved populations.

The Measles Initiative is a long-term partnership among world leaders in public health that aims to reduce measles mortality and morbidity globally. UNICEF, WHO, U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), American Red Cross, and the United Nations Foundation are among the organizations contributing to these efforts. This global partnership has supported the vaccination of more than 700 million children since 2001.

"The Measles Initiative is very excited and optimistic about our new partnership with Lions. Lions, with members in many Measles Initiative priority countries, can provide an extremely valuable combination of social mobilization and organizational capability with political advocacy that complement our other partner organization activities. We also welcome the resource mobilization efforts already undertaken by Lions to help with campaign costs in 2010, as we face a large funding shortfall," said Andrea Gay, Executive Director of Children's Health, United Nations Foundation.

To support the Lions-Measles Initiative pilot program, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a grant of US \$400,000 to LCIF. To further support the work on measles and routine immunization strengthening, LCIF will provide an additional contribution of US \$300,000 to the project.



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“We are delighted that Lions Clubs International is becoming more involved in the fight against measles and strengthening routine immunization,” said Dr. Walt Orenstein, Deputy Director, Vaccine Delivery, at the Gates Foundation. “With its world-wide outreach, Lions is an important partner in ensuring that safe and effective vaccines reach families who need them most.”

Involvement from Lions will focus on three main areas: advocacy at the local, regional and national levels; direct involvement in social marketing and vaccination activities; and financial support. Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria will host the first four pilot programs. Lions’ leadership teams in the four pilot countries will coordinate, with Ministries of Health and other Measles Initiative partners, the program implementation and documentation of activities through the beginning of 2011.

Through combined efforts, the impact made in the fight against measles will greatly increase. As a result, more people without access to healthcare will be vaccinated against this infectious and deadly disease and higher numbers of measles-free communities will exist worldwide.

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Lions Clubs International Foundation

Lions Clubs International Foundation is the charitable arm of Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization in the world with 1.35 million members in 206 geographic areas and countries. LCIF was ranked by a Financial Times' study as the number one non-governmental organization with which to partner. Through SightFirst, LCIF has restored sight or saved the vision of 30 million people. Learn more about LCIF at lcif.org.

Measles Initiative

Launched in 2001, the Measles Initiative—led by the American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF and the World Health Organization—provides technical and financial support to governments and communities for mass vaccination campaigns and disease surveillance around the world. The Initiative has supported the vaccination of more than 700 million children helping to reduce measles deaths by 78 percent globally (compared to 2000). To learn more, visit measlesinitiative.org.