



A fresh outbreak there has paralyzed more than a dozen children.

As wonderful as the world's ambitious quest to eradicate the poliovirus is, there also have been setbacks. All of a sudden, a new outbreak has appeared in Syria. Is the goal about to be lost? Not exactly, but the mixture of optimism and worry is warranted.

As recently as the mid-1980s, polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children a year in 125 countries where it was endemic. By contrast, so far this year, the last three endemic countries have reported a total of only six cases of wild poliovirus: four in Afghanistan, two in Pakistan and none so far this year in Nigeria. This is an extraordinary accomplishment.

The numbers are so low today that eradication may indeed be within reach if there is not another setback in the remaining endemic countries. For this, immunization and surveillance must be sustained.

On June 12, philanthropists and governments once again backed the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a public-private partnership aimed at the second-ever eradication of a disease, after smallpox.

At the Rotary International convention in Atlanta, \$1.2 billion was pledged. Up to \$150 million raised in the next three years by Rotary International will be matched two-to-one by the Gates Foundation, which pledged a total of \$450 million, including the match. The remaining will come from other donors, all to make sure there is no relapse and a final fight to the finish.

The one dark spot is Syria, where a fresh outbreak has paralyzed 17 children, most from Mayadin, south of Deir al-Zour, and one child from Raqqa, where the Islamic State is headquartered.

This is the second polio outbreak of the war, caused by a weakened form of the virus from the vaccine itself, which in rare cases mutates and becomes virulent against the unvaccinated. The real culprit is the upheaval of war.

Fortunately, there is an effective vaccine and a fair amount of experience in extinguishing such an outbreak, and with enough effort and immunization, it can be contained.