

Rotary and Dairy Queen partner to fight polio

Submitted

NEEPAWA ROTARY CLUB

Although Canada was certified “polio free” in 1994, the threat of the virus spreading back to Canada is very real. On Oct. 24, World Polio Day, The Rotary Club of Neepawa is partnering with Neepawa Dairy Queen to raise money to help vaccinate children in remote areas of the world, where the disease is endemic.

Fifty per cent of all purchases at Dairy Queen between 4:30 and 7:30 will go towards eradicating polio. One of the event organizers, Rotary president Ron Nordstrom reports, “For every dollar raised, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will match it 2-1. That means for \$100 raised, \$300 will go towards eradicating polio.”

Polio is a highly infectious disease that most commonly affects children under the age of five. The virus is spread person-to-person, typically through contaminated water. It can attack the nervous system, and in some instances, lead to paralysis. Although there is no cure, there is a safe and effective vaccine.

In 1985, Rotary launched PolioPlus, a global mass vaccination program. Since then, Rotary has contrib-

uted more than \$1.7 billion and countless volunteer hours to immunize over 2.5 billion children worldwide.

Because polio was brought under control in Canada in the early 1970s, we have forgotten how afraid we once were. Between 1949 and 1954, an estimated 11,000 Canadians were left paralyzed by polio. Parents were advised to keep their children away from crowds, and schools and movie theatres were closed. Hysteria grew and people were quarantined. The disease peaked in 1953, with nearly 9,000 cases and 500 deaths.

In 1988, there were an estimated 350,000 cases of polio worldwide. Only 33 cases of polio were documented in 2018. That is a 99 per cent reduction. Right now there are

only three countries where polio remains endemic: Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. However, after being polio free for 19 years, last month two cases of polio were reported in the Philippines.

So do Canadians need to be concerned about polio in other parts of the world? You bet we do. In our ultra-connected world, polio is no more than a plane ride away. Within 10 years, failure to eradicate the disease from the few remaining areas could result in as many as 200,000 new cases every year.

We all need to eat. On Oct. 24, why not treat your family to supper and treats at Dairy Queen? Not only will you get a tasty meal, you will help to fight polio and ensure it never appears in Canada again.