

Polio True Story—Rehana

Taken from Polio True Stories TV Series Produced & Directed by Sharp Cut Films

In 2006, in the whole of Punjab, there were only two children crippled by polio – this story introduces you to one of them – one and a half year old Rehana.

Rehana is one of four siblings, but as a young baby she remained consistently unwell, suffering from persistent episodes of diarrhea and also contracted measles. The main reason for Rehana’s continual illness was because she did not receive complete routine immunization before the age of one, to protect her and ensure a healthy life.

At this early age, things got worse when she contracted polio, and today Rehana can’t walk. Her disability is most severe in one leg, which is totally limp, but yet Rehana’s parents are still optimistic that she will get better. “I would really like her to walk... Please help her walk,” begs Rehana’s mother to Tauseeq Haider from SharpCut Films, with an expression that only a mother could give, but yet, there is no cure for polio, and so Rehana will never be able to walk and play like others her age.

Rehana’s grandmother worries about Rehana day and night. “My heart comes to my throat when I see her. Today she is a child, but when she grows up, what will she do then?” Polio is not easy to live with, and this family is now aware of this, but only because they had to experience it first hand. They will have to live with the fact that Rehana will always face problems because she was not protected against a disease which could have been prevented.

But why didn't Rehana get her complete routine immunization one questions—two answers are apparent; one a failure of the health system and the second relating to awareness of the family. In this area, the vaccinator providing routine immunization outreach, failed to visit Rehana’s home with the vaccines. Due to a lack of awareness towards the benefits of complete routine immunization, her family did not feel it necessary to take their daughter to the nearest health facility and her routine immunization was left incomplete.

It is vital for every child to complete their routine immunization course and visit the health facility five times before the age of one, to ensure that they are protected against seven vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and polio. There is no need for any child to face the illnesses that Rehana had to – prevention is available.

If all children under the age of five are immunized in every campaign, then polio can be eradicated from Pakistan, and no child will ever have to see a life like Rehana. This is the only vaccine preventable disease, after smallpox, that can be eradicated, and most of the world is polio-free. There are only four countries in the world that are still polio endemic: Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Nigeria. Pakistan has the chance to be the next polio-free country, but only if all children under five are given polio drops in every campaign.

We all have the power to protect our children through immunization- for their sake it should not be abused. If we immunize all our children under the age of five with polio drops in every campaign, we will never have to see more children like Rehana.



Images courtesy Sharp Cut Films



Rehana’s story is just one in the series of polio true stories produced and directed by SharpCut Films.