Statement from CIDRAP Director Dr. Michael Osterholm on the passing of William Foege, MD, MPH

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of Dr. William H. Foege, a towering figure in global public health whose visionary leadership changed the course of human history. Bill's contributions to the eradication of smallpox stand as one of the most extraordinary achievements in medicine and epidemiology. Under his guidance, a disease that once claimed millions of lives was brought to an end, not through brute force but through ingenuity, scientific rigor, community engagement and a profound commitment to protecting the world’s most vulnerable. His work did not just defeat a scourge; it redefined what is possible in public health and demonstrated the power of evidence-based strategy to build trust and save lives on a global scale.

William Foege, MD, MPH

CDC, James Gathany / Wikimedia Commons

“Bill’s legacy is vast and enduring, and his efforts did not stop with smallpox. He inspired generations of public health professionals, strengthened immunization programs worldwide, and served the public with distinction, including leading the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [then called the Centers for Disease Control] and co-founding The Task Force for Global Health.

“I’m one of those people whom Bill inspired. I benefited from his mentorship and his insight. For that, I count myself incredibly lucky—a feeling I know I share with many.

“Bill’s courage, creativity, and compassion continue to guide all of us working to improve health across communities and borders. On behalf of CIDRAP, I extend our deepest condolences to his family, colleagues, and the countless individuals whose lives were saved through his work. Bill's life is testament to the profound impact that one dedicated individual can have on the health of humanity.”