

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT POLIO

Poliomyelitis, or polio, is a viral infection caused by the poliovirus, a type of enterovirus (RNA). There are three types of polio viruses, and immunity to one type does not mean that you have immunity to other types. The illness is spread easily from person to person. It may begin with flu-like symptoms and can lead to paralysis (loss of the ability to move) or weakness in arms, legs or both which can lead to loss of life.

The most important way for children and adults to protect themselves from polio is to get vaccinated if they have not received all recommended polio vaccine doses. Children should get four doses of poliovirus vaccine starting at age 2 months. People starting the vaccine series after age 4 should receive a total of three doses. Adults who were fully vaccinated as children and who are at risk for being exposed to polio virus through a relationship, exposure at work or international travel should get one adult booster dose vaccine.

WHO GETS POLIO?

An unvaccinated person can get polio at any age. The risk of severe disease and death after polio infection increases as they get older.

HOW IS POLIO SPREAD?

Polio is very contagious and can travel silently in a community. A person can spread the virus even if they aren't sick. It is most often spread through feces (poop) from an infected person that might be on the hands or objects they touch. Constant handwashing, especially after using the bathroom and after changing diapers, is very important. It is also possible to spread the virus through saliva and respiratory droplets when you cough. Polio is easily spread within unvaccinated households.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear? People who are exposed to the virus may develop infection 3 to 6 days after exposure; paralysis would occur between 7 and 21 days after exposure.

When and for how long is a person able to spread polio? The virus is very contagious. Anyone with a virus infection can spread the virus before they have symptoms and even if they never feel sick. Individuals can spread disease for 1 to 2 weeks through saliva or mucus and for several weeks in their poop.

HOW CAN POLIO BE PREVENTED?

Polio and its complications can be prevented with vaccination. Vaccination protects against both wild poliovirus and vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV). The only effective way to prevent infection is by maintaining the highest possible vaccination levels in your community.

HOW CAN PEOPLE GET VACCINATED AGAINST POLIO?

Talk to your health care provider or your child's provider to schedule an appointment for vaccination against polio. Make sure they're protected from other dangerous diseases, such as measles, mumps, whooping cough, chickenpox, and COVID-19.

WHAT VACCINES ARE AVAILABLE FOR POLIO?

There are two types of polio vaccine, but the inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) is the only one that has been used in the U.S. since 2000. IPV does not cause polio because it does not contain live virus. It cannot mutate (change) to cause polio disease. The injectable vaccine is given through a shot in the leg or arm and cannot cause paralysis. The vaccine is safe, is very effective and cannot give you polio. Side effects of the shot are mild, including arm or leg soreness where the shot was given.

Oral polio vaccine (OPV), which is no longer used in the United States, is a live attenuated virus vaccine that contains a weakened version of the virus.

What is a vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV)? VDPV is a strain of the weakened poliovirus that was included in the live attenuated virus oral vaccine. VDPV can spread the same way as the regular poliovirus. VDPV may also cause illness, including paralysis.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I EVER RECEIVED THE POLIO VACCINE?

The U.S. does not have a national organization that maintains vaccination records. The records that exist are the ones you or your parents were given when you were vaccinated and the ones in the medical record of the doctor or clinic where the vaccines were given.

If you need official copies of vaccination records, or if you need to update your own records, there are several places you can look:

- Ask parents or other caregivers if they have records of your childhood immunizations.
- Try looking through baby books or other saved documents from your childhood.
- Check with your high school and/or college health services for dates of any immunizations. Keep in mind that generally records are kept only for 1-2 years after students leave the system.
- Check with previous employers (including the military) that may have required immunizations.
- Check with your doctor or public health clinic. Keep in mind that vaccination records are maintained at a doctor's office for a limited number of years.
- Contact the [state's health department](#) where you received the vaccination to see if they have an immunization reporting system.

[If you were vaccinated in Pennsylvania, your vaccine records may have been reported to the vaccine registry. Reporting to this system is voluntary and childhood vaccination records on adults are less likely to be found in this system.](#)

- [If you believe your records may have been reported to the Pennsylvania registry, you can](#) call: 877-774-4748 to reach out to [PA-SIIS](#) (PA's confidential, computerized immunization registry), or email: RA-DHVaxRecords@pa.gov
 - [If you believe your records may have been reported to the Philadelphia registry, reach out to Request your immunization record | Services | City of Philadelphia](#)
- If you cannot find your records, talk to your medical provider about re-vaccination.

DOES PAST INFECTION WITH POLIO PROVIDE IMMUNITY?

Not necessarily. Since there are three types of polio virus, infection with any one type provides immunity to that type but not to the other two types. Polio is a dangerous disease and getting vaccinated is the best protection.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR POLIO?

There are no specific medicines or antibiotics that treat polio. People with polio need medical care to address possible complications because of the disease.

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN VACCINATED AGAINST POLIO OUTSIDE OF THE U.S.?

If you were vaccinated against polio outside of the United States, make sure that your vaccination series meets the U.S. recommendations. Make sure you have written, dated records that shows that the polio vaccine you have received protects you from all three polio types. If you do not have records or only have questionable proof of vaccination, you should ask your healthcare provider to review your records. Their recommendations for you will depend on how many polio vaccinations you have already received, which types of polio vaccine you have had, and the time available before protection is needed.

CAN I GET A POLIO BOOSTER?

Adults may receive a booster dose of inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) if they are at higher risk for exposure, or if traveling to areas with increased polio cases. Talk with your healthcare provider about getting one dose of IPV.

WHAT IS POST-POLIO SYNDROME?

Fatigue and weakness after minimal activity happen to 25% to 40% of persons who contracted paralytic poliomyelitis in childhood. New muscle pain and existing weakness can worsen. They can even develop new weakness or paralysis 15 to

40 years after the childhood infection. Post-polio syndrome is not a new polio infection, and persons experiencing this syndrome cannot pass the disease on to others.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **What is Polio?** [What is Polio? \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- **Polio: For Travelers** [Polio: For Travelers | CDC](#)
- **Polio Vaccination in the U.S.** [Polio Vaccination in the U.S. \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- **Polio Vaccination info for Parents** [Polio Vaccines for Children | CDC](#)
- **Tips for Finding Vaccine Records**
 - [Locating and Tracking Adult Vaccine Records | CDC](#)
 - [Tips for Locating Old Immunization Records \(immunize.org\)](#)

Feel free to reach out to the PADOH at **1-877-PA-HEALTH** (1-877-724-3258) or contact your local health department for additional information.