



Protect Yourself Against Polio

Poliomyelitis, or polio, is a viral infection caused by the poliovirus, a type of enterovirus. The illness is characterized by paralysis or weakness in arms, legs or both. There have been no cases of wild poliovirus acquired in the U.S. since 1979.

The most important way for children and adults to protect themselves from polio is to get vaccinated right away 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 poliovirus now should get one adult booster dose vaccine.

What You Need to Know About Polio

Who gets polio?

An unvaccinated person — child or adult — can get polio at any age.

How is polio spread?

Poliovirus is most often spread to people who are not fully vaccinated against polio through feces (poop) from an infected person on hands or objects. Frequent handwashing, especially after using the bathroom and after changing diapers, is very important. It is also possible to spread the poliovirus through saliva and respiratory droplets. Poliovirus is easily spread within unvaccinated households.

What are the symptoms of polio?

Most people infected with the poliovirus do not have any symptoms, although they can still be contagious. One in four people infected with poliovirus infection will have flu-like symptoms, such as sore throat, fever, tiredness, nausea and stomach pain. About four in 100 (4%) people with poliovirus infection experience meningitis, an infection of the fluid and membranes of the brain and spinal cord. About one in 200 (0.5%) people with poliovirus infection experience paralysis.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

People who are exposed to the poliovirus may develop infection three to six days after exposure; paralysis would occur between seven and 21 days after exposure.

When and for how long is a person able to spread polio?

The poliovirus is very contagious. Patients with poliovirus infection can spread the virus before and up to two weeks after they first have symptoms. However, patients can spread disease as long as the virus is in their feces or saliva. Poliovirus can spread from people even if they do not have any symptoms.

What vaccines are available for polio?

There are two types of polio vaccine: a live attenuated virus oral vaccine and an inactivated virus injectable vaccine. **Since 2000, only the inactivated virus injectable vaccine has been available in the U.S., although the live attenuated virus oral vaccine may still be used in other countries.**

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.

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 has changed over time and behaves more like the wild poliovirus. It can spread easily to people who are unvaccinated against polio and who come in contact with the feces, saliva or respiratory droplets, such as from a sneeze, of an infected person. As with wild poliovirus, VDPV may cause illness, including paralysis, in people who are not vaccinated against polio.

How can polio be prevented?

Polio and its complications can be prevented with vaccination. Vaccination protects against both wild poliovirus and VDPV. The only effective control measure to prevent infection is maintaining the highest possible vaccination levels in the community.

How can people get vaccinated against polio?

Speak to your health care provider or your child's provider to schedule an appointment for vaccination against polio and other dangerous diseases, such as measles, mumps, whooping cough, chickenpox and COVID-19. If you do not have a provider, call **311** or **844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692)** for help finding one — care is provided in New York City regardless of immigration status, insurance or ability to pay.

Also, children ages 4 years and older can get their vaccine at the NYC Health Department's Fort Greene Health Center at 295 Flatbush Ave. Ext., Fifth Floor, Brooklyn, NY, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. To make an appointment, visit [nyc.gov](https://www.nyc.gov) and search for **immunization clinic**.

Does past infection with polio provide immunity?

Not necessarily. There are three types of poliovirus — 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 work against polio. People with polio need medical care to address potential complications of the disease and for rehabilitation.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 7.28.22