

Polio explained

The physical effects of polio may be mild but they can also be life threatening and some people will need to go to hospital. Polio may cause:

- Headache, fever, vomiting and muscle stiffness in mild cases.
- Swallowing and breathing problems caused by paralysis of the muscles.
- Death in severe cases - when breathing and other muscles are paralysed.

Polio is an infection

Polio is an infectious disease caused by a virus. It is found in the saliva and faeces of an infected person.

Polio can be prevented by immunisation

Children and adults need to be immunised to prevent polio infection. The most common vaccine used against polio is oral polio vaccine (OPV), but some people may need a different vaccine called inactivated polio vaccine (IPV).

The oral vaccine suits most people

The oral polio vaccine:

- Is swallowed as a small amount of liquid
- Contains small amounts of weakened live polio virus
- Is low in side effects.

Very rarely OPV causes paralysis - in about one in every 2.5 million doses. Special care with hand washing after going to the toilet reduces the risk of this paralysis.

Oral polio vaccine should not be given to people with low immunity

The oral polio vaccine should not be given to people with low immunity, or others who may come in close with them.

This includes people:

- With cancer, leukaemia and HIV/AIDS.
- Who are having medical treatment for cancer (for example, radiotherapy or chemotherapy) and some medications, such as cortisone.
- With a disease that can lower immunity.

Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV)

People who are unable to have oral polio vaccine may be given inactivated polio vaccine (IPV).

How to prevent polio in children

Children should receive oral polio vaccine at each of the following ages:

- Two, four and six months
- Four to five years
- 15 to 19 years, just before leaving school.

Preventing polio in adults

Adults should:

- Have had at least three doses of polio vaccine in the past.
- Have a single dose of oral polio vaccine if they have only ever had IPV.
- Have a booster if they travel to an area where polio is widespread.
- Have a booster if they are health care workers in possible contact with polio.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- A Maternal and Child Health service
- Your local community health centre
- Hospital emergency or casualty department.

Things to remember

- Polio is a preventable life threatening disease.
- All adults and children need to be immunised.
- Wash your hands carefully after you go to the toilet after polio immunisation.
- People with lowered immunity may need a different polio vaccine.

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