

## What is polio?

Polio is caused by a virus that lives in the throat and intestinal tract. Most infections do not cause serious illness. However, some people who get polio become paralyzed – that is, they lose the use of their muscles. This is called *paralytic polio*. Paralytic polio can start like a common cold, but often with severe muscle pain. Paralysis usually comes within the first week. Most often it affects the legs, but sometimes it affects other muscles including those that control breathing. Some recover from their paralysis, but many will be permanently disabled.

## Who gets polio?

Anyone who has not been vaccinated can get the disease. Because there are people throughout the world and in the United States that are not vaccinated, it is possible that infected travelers can carry polio to unvaccinated people.

## How is polio spread?

The poliovirus is found in the stool and throat. It is spread through contact with the stool of an infected person. Poliovirus must be swallowed to cause infection. This can happen when hands that are contaminated with stool are put in the mouth.

## What are the symptoms of polio?

Most persons infected do not have symptoms. However, if symptoms occur it may include fever, tiredness, headache, nausea, stiffness in the neck, pain in the limbs, or vomiting. These symptoms will usually occur six to 20 days after exposure, but can range from three to 35 days.

## How long can an infected person spread polio?

Poliovirus can be found in throat secretions as early as 36 hours and in stool 72 hours after exposure. The virus can be passed through throat secretions for up to one week and in stool for three to six weeks. Infected persons are most contagious a few days before and after the onset of symptoms. Infected persons that do not have symptoms can also pass the virus to others. Persons that are immunocompromised (HIV, asplenic, or undergoing cancer treatment) may be able to pass the virus for longer periods of time.

## How is polio prevented?

Polio is prevented by the polio vaccine. The vaccine covers all three types of polio virus. There are two vaccines, an oral polio vaccine (OPV) and an inactivated polio vaccine (IPV). Currently only the IPV is given in the United States. The OPV has not been used in the United States since 2000, but is still given in many parts of the world. Contact your healthcare provider for more information regarding the vaccine.

## Is there a treatment for polio?

There is not treatment for polio. Prevention with the polio vaccine is best. However, if you see symptoms similar to polio contact your healthcare provider immediately.

