

Polio and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

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The best way to protect against polio is to get the polio vaccine, also called IPV (or inactivated poliovirus vaccine). Doctors recommend all children get the vaccine.

What is polio?

Polio (or poliomyelitis) is a disease caused by poliovirus. It can cause lifelong paralysis (can't move parts of the body), and it can be deadly.

Why should my child get the polio shot?

The polio shot:

- Protects your child from polio, a potentially serious disease.
- Prevents your child from developing lifelong paralysis from polio.

Is the polio shot safe?

Yes. The polio vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing polio.

Doctors recommend that your child get four doses of the polio vaccine (also called IPV) for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 through 18 months
- 4 through 6 years



What are the side effects?

Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most children who get polio shots have no side effects. When side effects do occur, they are usually mild, like temporary redness and pain where the shot was given.

What are the symptoms of poliovirus infection?

Most people who get infected with poliovirus do not have any symptoms. Some people (25 people out of 100) will have flu-like symptoms. These symptoms usually last 2 to 5 days.

In rare cases, poliovirus infection can be very serious. About 1 out of 200 people will have weakness or paralysis in their arms, legs, or both. This paralysis or weakness can last a lifetime.

Is it serious?

The risk of lifelong paralysis is very serious. Even children who seem to fully recover can develop new muscle pain, weakness, or paralysis as adults, 15 to 40 years later.

About 2 to 10 children out of 100 who have paralysis from polio die because the virus affects the muscles that help them breathe.

How does polio spread?

Poliovirus is very contagious. It spreads through contact with the stool (poop) of an infected person or droplets from a sneeze or cough. If you get stool or droplets from an infected person on your hands and you touch your mouth, you can get infected. Also, if your child puts objects, like toys, that have stool or droplets on them into their mouth, they can get infected.

An infected person may spread the virus to others immediately before and usually 1 to 2 weeks after developing symptoms. The virus may live in an infected person's stool for many weeks. He or she can contaminate food and water when they touch it with unwashed hands.

Do people still get polio in the United States?

No, the United States has been polio-free for more than 30 years, but the disease still occurs in other parts of the world. It would only take one person with polio traveling from another country to bring polio back to the United States.

Where can I learn more about the polio shot and my child?

To learn more about the polio shot, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.