



Fact Sheet

Poliomyelitis (Polio)

What is poliomyelitis (polio)?

Polio is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus that invades the central nervous system. The poliovirus can occasionally cause paralysis. Since polio immunization has become widespread, cases of polio are very rare. The last naturally-occurring case of polio in the United States occurred in 1979.

How is polio spread?

The polio virus is spread via the fecal-oral route mainly, but has also been spread oral-oral route. Persons infected with the virus are most infectious from 7 to 10 days before and after the onset of symptoms. The virus may be present in the stool from 3 to 6 weeks after the onset of symptoms.

The polio virus enters the body through the mouth and multiplies in the intestinal tract. The virus then spreads throughout the body and can infect nerve fibers, resulting in the destruction of motor neurons.

What are the symptoms of polio?

Up to 95% of all polio infections do not have any symptoms. Initial symptoms of polio usually occur 6 to 20 days after infection and include fever, fatigue, nausea, flu-like symptoms, stiffness in the neck and back, and pain in the limbs. Aseptic (non-bacterial) meningitis occurs in 1-2% of infections. Roughly 1 in 100 infections lead to paralysis, usually in only one side of the body. Many persons with paralytic polio recover completely. Weakness or paralysis still present 12 months after illness is usually permanent. Among those paralyzed, 5% to 10% die when their breathing muscles become immobilized.

What is the treatment for polio?

There is no cure for polio. Treatment involves supportive care.

Are there complications from polio?

Complications include paralysis (most commonly of the legs). Paralysis of the breathing and swallowing muscles can be fatal.

How can polio be prevented?

The polio vaccine is given in four doses: at 2 months, 4 months, 6 to 18 months, and between 4 to 6 years of age. The polio vaccine given in the United States is inactivated (killed virus). The use of live polio vaccine is common in other parts of the world, but is not recommended in the U.S. Adults traveling to countries where polio cases are occurring should review their immunization status.

How do I get more information on polio?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/polio/public/index.html

Spanish: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/child/polio-basics-color-sp.pdf

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