

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## POLIOMYELITIS

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus that invades the nervous system. Sometimes it does not cause serious illness, but sometimes it causes paralysis (can't move arm or leg) that can lead to permanent disability and death. Polio used to be very common in the United States. It paralyzed and killed thousands of people a year before there was a vaccine for it.

### Symptoms

- Approximately 95% of persons infected with polio will have no symptoms.
- If a person has symptoms, they usually appear within 6 to 20 days. They may be mild, including fever, fatigue, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, excruciating muscle pain and stiffness in the neck and back.
- Most people's symptoms go away completely, but complications can include paralysis (most commonly of the legs). It can even kill people who get it, usually by paralyzing the muscles that help them breathe and swallow. The death rate increases with increasing age.

### Transmission

- Polio is spread by person-to-person contact and only affects humans. The virus enters a person's body through the mouth and leaves in the feces (poop). It can spread to others through unwashed hands or objects contaminated by feces.
- Patients are most infectious from 7 to 10 days before and after the onset of symptoms. Occasionally, they may be contagious for several weeks or months.
- There are three types of polio virus. Lifelong immunity usually depends on which type of virus a person contracts. Second attacks are rare and result from infection with a different type.

### Treatment

- There is no cure for polio. Treatments can only help support the ill person during illness.

### Prevention

- The best way to prevent polio is to get vaccinated. Two types of polio vaccine are available: oral polio vaccine (OPV) and inactivated polio vaccine (IPV). IPV contains no live virus and is now used exclusively in the United States. Adults traveling to countries where polio cases are occurring should review their immunization status.
- IPV is a shot, given in the leg or arm. Polio vaccine may be given with other vaccines.

### Additional Information

- The last case of wild-virus polio acquired in the United States was in 1979. Several countries in Africa and Asia still have cases of polio; however, with continued use of polio vaccination, global polio eradication may be achieved.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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