



Polio (Poliomyelitis) Fact Sheet

What is polio?

Polio is an illness that ranges in severity from no symptoms to paralysis that can be followed by death. It can cause the muscles to become weak and therefore require the assistance of crutches to walk. It can also affect the muscles that are responsible for breathing and swallowing. This type frequently threatens life.

Who gets polio?

At the present time there is no polio virus in the United States. However, children need to be protected early in life and adults traveling to foreign countries should get a booster of the polio vaccine to ensure protection.

How is polio spread?

Polio is spread through the fecal-oral route (eating or drinking after using the bathroom and not washing hands properly). It can also be transmitted from a person that receives the oral polio vaccine (OPV) to a person that has cancer, leukemia, HIV infection, or is going through chemotherapy. Individuals with these types of disease should stay away from persons receiving OPV for a period of 2 months.

What are the symptoms of polio?

Symptoms include fever, tiredness, headache, nausea, and vomiting. These symptoms usually last 2 to 5 days. About 72% infected persons have no symptoms. A smaller

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proportion of people with polio will develop other more serious symptoms that affect the brain and spinal cord.

How long can an infected person spread polio?

An infected person may spread the virus to others immediately before and about 1 to 2 weeks after symptoms appear. The virus can live in an infected person's feces for many weeks.

Can a person get polio more than once?

There are 3 types of polio. A person cannot be infected by the same type more than once but may become infected with a different type.

Is there a treatment for polio?

Once the virus that causes polio has infected a person, there is no treatment that will cure polio.

How can polio be prevented?

A series of 4 doses of vaccine is recommended for children at 2 months, 4 months, 6-18 months, and 4-6 years. Adults traveling overseas should receive a booster dose of the polio vaccine to be protected.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health
Department (405) 425-4437*

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