

Poliomyelitis (Polio)

Fact Sheet

What is Poliomyelitis (Polio)?

Polio is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus that affects the nervous system.

What are the symptoms?

95% of persons infected with polio will have no symptoms. Approximately 4-8% of infected persons have minor symptoms such as fever, fatigue, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, stiffness in the neck and back, and pain in the limbs. These symptoms often resolve completely. Less than 1% of cases result in permanent paralysis of the limbs (usually the legs). Of those, 5-10% die when the paralysis strikes the respiratory muscles.

How is the virus transmitted?

The virus can pass from person to person through the stool (feces) of an infected person. It can then spread to another person on unwashed hands, contaminated food or objects.

How can it be prevented?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Make sure hands are properly washed after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing foods.
- Get vaccinated. Children are vaccinated with inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) with their routine childhood immunizations. Most adults do not need polio vaccine because they have already received it as children. A booster dose may be recommended if you are travelling to polio-endemic or high-risk areas of the world. Ask your healthcare provider for specific information on whether you need to be vaccinated.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349.
Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Heymann, D. L., (2008). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Public Health Agency of Canada, (2006). *Canadian Immunization Guide*. (7th Ed.). Ottawa, ON: Public Works & Government Services.

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