



POLIO (Poliomyelitis)

What is POLIO?

Polio is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus that invades the nervous system and can cause muscle weakness and paralysis.

How is polio spread?

Polio spreads when the stool of an infected person is introduced into the mouth of another person through contaminated food or water (fecal-oral transmission). Oral-oral transmission is also possible by way of an infected person's saliva.

Who can get polio?

After the introduction of the polio vaccine in 1955, the number of cases of polio in the United States decreased dramatically. The last naturally occurring case in the U.S. was in 1979. Travelers to countries where polio cases still occur should know if they are immune or be fully immunized.

What are the symptoms?

Up to 95 percent of persons infected with polio will have no symptoms. About 4-8 percent of infected persons have minor symptoms such as fever, fatigue, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, neck stiffness and pain in the limbs. Less than 1 percent of cases result in paralysis.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is commonly 7-14 days with a range of three to possibly 35 days.

How is polio treated?

There is no specific treatment or cure for polio other than supportive care.

Is there a vaccine to prevent polio?

Polio is vaccine-preventable. Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), given as an injection, should be given at 2, 4 and 6-18 months of age, and again at 4-6 years. IPV replaced the oral polio vaccine (OPV) that was used before 2000.