

Polio General Information

What is polio?

Poliomyelitis [polio] is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. It invades the nervous system, and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours. The virus enters the body through the mouth and multiplies in the intestine. One in 200 infections leads to irreversible paralysis [usually in the legs]. Of those paralyzed, 5-10% die when their breathing muscles become immobilized. There is a worldwide effort to eradicate polio through immunization.

Who can get polio?

Polio mainly affects children under 3 years of age. Unimmunized individuals are at highest risk for polio.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may include:

- fever
- headache
- vomiting
- stiffness in the neck
- pain in the limbs
- fatigue

What is the treatment?

Although there is no cure for polio, medical procedures are available to manage symptoms.

How can you prevent polio?

Every child should get a polio vaccine injection at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months of age. A booster dose at 4-6 years completes the series. This vaccine is given at the same time as diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus vaccine [DPTP]. Individuals travelling to countries where polio is prevalent should be immunized. Consult a travel clinic.