



HEALTH INFORMATION

Polio

Polio is a serious, potentially paralysing illness caused by one of three different types of polio virus. It is easily prevented by vaccination.

The World Health Organization reports that the following countries have had cases of polio since January 2007:

Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo and Uganda.

If you are travelling to any of these countries or you are unsure about your risk, see your GP or travel clinic for advice as soon as possible.

Polio is contracted by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, swimming in dirty water or by close contact with someone carrying the polio virus. Although most infections with the polio virus have few or no symptoms, there is no way to predict who will become seriously ill or paralysed if they catch polio.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever (high temperature), sore throat and flu-like illness.
- Sickness, stomach pain and diarrhoea or constipation.
- One in 200 polio infections causes permanent paralysis in the legs, arms and/or muscles used for breathing.
- There is a risk of dying if breathing muscles become paralysed.

Very occasionally people who had polio in the past, usually as children, develop muscle weakness many years later.

Vaccination

Polio vaccine is recommended for:

- All babies, from two months of age (Routine Childhood Immunisation Schedule).
- Travellers who have not had a dose of polio vaccine in the past 10 years and who are going to countries where there are reported cases of polio.
- Anyone who might come into contact with polio at work: e.g. ambulance staff, doctors, nurses and laboratory staff.
- Anyone who has never had the vaccine.

Even if you have a history of polio disease, you should still receive a booster vaccine dose if travelling to a polio-risk country. Previous polio disease does not necessarily protect against another episode of polio.

In the UK, diphtheria vaccine is given in combination with polio and tetanus.