



Poliomyelitis Vaccination

What is poliomyelitis?

Poliomyelitis, or “polio”, is a rare infection with one of 3 types of poliovirus that can cause permanent muscle paralysis and wasting. Polio has been eliminated from Australia by mass immunisation but it still occurs in some developing countries among unimmunised people. If high levels of polio immunisation are not maintained then polio epidemics will return.

Why should my child be vaccinated against polio?

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that all Australian children should routinely be vaccinated against polio at 2, 4, and 6 months, and at 4 years of age. Also, a booster dose of polio vaccine every 10 years is recommended for travellers to countries where polio still occurs. The NHMRC also recommends that children should be vaccinated with Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) combination vaccines (e.g. DTPa-IPV) when they become available. IPV combination vaccines are unlikely to be available in Australia until 2005 or later. In the meantime, Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is recommended.

Where can I get my child vaccinated against polio?

At your GP, Local Government (Council) immunisation clinic (in the metropolitan area), or local Community Nurse immunisation clinic. Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is free. Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) is free for immunosuppressed children (e.g. children with AIDS or on high-dose corticosteroid treatment) or their household contacts; otherwise, IPV must be prescribed by a doctor.

Who should not be vaccinated against polio?

People who have had a severe allergic reaction to any of the vaccine components (e.g. neomycin) or to a previous dose of that vaccine. OPV should not be given to pregnant women or to immunosuppressed people or their household contacts.

What are the side effects from polio vaccination?

Common (~5%), temporary side effects of OPV include diarrhoea, headache, muscle soreness. OPV, because it contains live vaccine polioviruses, can cause permanent muscle paralysis and wasting in about 1 in 2 million vaccinated children. IPV, because it contains inactivated (or “killed”) vaccine polioviruses, cannot cause muscle paralysis.

What is the treatment for the side effects from vaccinations?

Paracetamol is recommended to reduce fever and pain (**DO NOT OVERDOSE**). Extra fluids (e.g. breast milk or water) and cooling (e.g. by fan, tepid sponging or bathing) are recommended to reduce fever. If any reaction is severe or if you are worried about any symptoms, immediately contact your doctor, community nurse, or local hospital.

Where can I get more information about polio vaccines?

Ask your GP, local Public Health Unit, community nurse, health worker, the Central Immunisation Clinic (telephone 9321 1312), or use the Internet, e.g. www.immunise.health.gov.au/handbook.htm, www.cdc.gov/nip, www.immunisation.nhs.uk.