

Poliomyelitis (polio)

Immunisation information

Poliomyelitis (Polio)

People in Australia need to be immunised against polio. A recent case in Victoria alerts us to the need for ongoing immunisation against polio. There are still cases of the disease overseas, and there is a risk of it being re-established here if children and adults are not immunised.

Polio may cause mild symptoms or very severe illness. It is a virus which affects the digestive and nervous systems. It causes fever, vomiting and muscle stiffness and can affect the nerves, causing permanent crippling.

The disease can paralyse breathing and swallowing muscles, leading to death. Between two percent and five percent of people with polio die from it and about half of all patients who survive suffer permanent paralysis.

Polio can be caught if the faeces of an infected person contaminates food, water or hands.

Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)

IPV is given by injection. IPV contains three types of inactivated polio viruses. A course of three injections with an interval of four weeks between each dose produces long lasting immunity.

IPV is interchangeable with oral polio vaccine (OPV) if previous polio doses were given by mouth.

Adults

Adults should be sure that they have received at least three doses of polio vaccine in the past. If this is not the case an immunisation provider should be consulted so that 'catch-up' immunisation can be arranged.

Booster doses are recommended for adults only if they are at risk.

Those at risk are:

- Travellers to areas or countries where polio is present and widespread
- Health care workers in possible contact with persons with poliomyelitis

These people should have a booster dose of polio every 10 years.

Possible side effects of polio vaccine

Common side effects:

- Muscle aches
- Low grade fever
- Soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site
- A temporary small lump at the injection site

Extremely rare side effect:

- Severe allergic reaction

If mild reactions do occur, they may last one to two days. The side effects can be reduced by:

- Drinking extra fluids
- Not overdressing
- Placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site
- Taking (or giving your child) paracetamol to reduce any discomfort (note the recommended dose for the age of your child)

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor or hospital.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before you or your child are immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply:

- Are unwell on the day of immunisation (temperature over 38.5°C)
- Have had a severe reaction to any vaccine
- Have had an anaphylactic reaction to any vaccine component (for example, neomycin)

Further information

The following websites offer resources and further information

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation
www.immunise.health.gov.au



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