

Polio Frequently Asked Questions [Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon]

What is polio?

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease caused by the polio virus. It invades the nervous system, and can cause paralysis or even death in a matter of hours.

How is polio transmitted?

The polio virus (scientifically known as the wild poliovirus - WPV) enters the body through the mouth, in water or food that has been contaminated with faecal material from an infected person. The virus multiplies in the intestine and is excreted by the infected person in faeces, which can pass on the virus to others.

What are the symptoms of polio?

Initial symptoms of polio are:

- i. Fever
- ii. Fatigue
- iii. Headache
- iv. Vomiting
- v. Stiffness in the neck
- vi. Pain in the limbs.

Who is at risk of catching polio?

Polio mainly affects children under 5 years of age.

What are the effects of polio?

The effects of polio are:

- i. One in every 200 persons infected with polio leads to irreversible paralysis (usually in the legs).
- ii. Among those paralyzed, 5%-10% die when their breathing muscles are immobilized by the virus.

Is there a cure for polio?

No there is no cure for polio. Polio can only be prevented by immunization. A safe and effective vaccine exists - the oral polio vaccine (OPV). OPV is essential protection for children against polio. Given multiple times, it protects a child for life.

Is Syria the only country with polio?

No. Polio still exists in parts of a few countries – but it has almost gone from the world. In 1988, governments launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to banish polio to the history books. Since then, thanks to mass immunization campaigns, polio cases have fallen worldwide by over 99 per cent. As recently as 20 years ago, 1000 children EVERY SINGLE DAY were paralyzed by polio. In 2012, thanks to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, this was down 223 children in the entire year. This is the closest we have been to complete eradication.

What are the relevant regional governments doing to protect their children against polio?

The Governments of the region are conducting national campaigns to immunize **ALL** children under 5 years with oral polio vaccine. Several international and local agencies are helping the government to plan and run the immunization drives, including, UNICEF, WHO and other humanitarian and civil society groups. Great emphasis is on marginalized areas. They are most vulnerable and least likely to be immunized.

What are the National Immunization Campaigns?

These national campaigns are days set apart all over the nation to immunize ALL children less than five years against polio, using the oral polio vaccine. Vaccinators will come to the community bringing polio vaccine for every child. It is critical during this campaign that parents ensure EVERY child receives the vaccine on those days.

What will happen if these campaigns do not reach every child?

If the national campaigns do not reach every child before the rainy season starts, then polio will spread faster and paralyze more children.

Should a child receive OPV during polio campaigns and routine immunization?

Yes. Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is safe and effective and every extra dose means a child gets extra protection against polio. It takes multiple doses of OPV to achieve full immunity against polio. If a child has received the vaccine before, then extra doses given during this campaign and future ones will give valuable additional immunity against polio.

Does the Acute Flaccid Paralysis Surveillance system help to detect polio?

The Acute Flaccid Paralysis Surveillance system is a critical part of the protection available for families against polio. It is disease surveillance programme in every district across Indonesia and the world. If a child suddenly shows signs of a floppy, or weak arm or leg, health authorities should be informed immediately so that a sample of the child's faeces can be taken for analysis and the child can get proper treatment. It is very important to act fast – polio is VERY infectious.

Why are children given oral polio vaccines?

Polio vaccine is the only protection against polio, a paralyzing disease for which there is no cure. It is essential that every child under five in the region is immunized against polio during the current polio outbreak.

Does the oral polio vaccine have any side effects?

The oral polio vaccine is one of the safest vaccines ever developed. It is so safe it can be given to sick children and newborns. It has been used all over the world to protect children against polio, saving at least 8 million children from permanent paralysis by polio. In extremely rare cases (approximately 1 in every 2.7 million first doses of the vaccine), OPV can cause paralysis. The regions children are more at risk from wild poliovirus than any side effects from the polio vaccine.

IPV – inactivated polio vaccine – has no risk at all and is used in many countries.

Why are our children being given OPV?

IPV is the routine vaccine of choice of high income and most middle income countries that have stopped WPV transmission. IPV protects children well from polio. However, only OPV has the unique ability to not only vaccinate the child but also to reinforce immunization status through the environment, so for outbreaks in Syria and neighboring countries OPV remains the best choice to stop the virus spreading.

Is OPV safe and halal?

OPV is safe and has been declared halal by Islamic leaders all over the world – the Grand Sheik Tantawi of Al-Azhar University, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and the Majelis Council of Ulemmas in Indonesia.

Is it safe to administer multiple doses of OPV to children?

Yes, it is safe to administer multiple doses of polio vaccine to children. The vaccine is designed to be administered multiple times to ensure full protection. In the tropics where the weather is hot, several doses of polio vaccine are required for a child to be fully protected – sometimes more than ten. This vaccine is safe for all children. Each additional dose further strengthens a child's immunity level against polio.

How many doses of OPV does a child need before they are protected?

OPV needs to be administered multiple times to be fully effective. The number of doses it takes to immunize a child depends entirely on the child's health and nutritional status, and how many other viruses that child has been exposed to. Until a child is fully immunized **THEY ARE STILL AT RISK FROM POLIO**. This just emphasizes to ensure that all children are immunized during every round of national immunization days that all children are immunized at the same time. Every missed child is a place for the polio virus to hide.

Is OPV safe for sick children and newborns?

Yes. OPV is safe to be given to sick children. In fact it is particularly critical that sick children are immunized during the campaigns, and newborn babies, because their immunity levels are lower than other children. All sick children and newborns should be immunized during the coming campaigns to give them the protection against polio that they desperately need.

Mothers and caretakers should remember that Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is not treatment for other childhood illnesses a child may have prior to immunization. Therefore, a mother/caretaker whose child gets polio vaccines when the child had a pre existing illness, should take the child to the nearest health center for proper medical care.

For more information on polio please go to: www.who.int/topics/poliomyelitis/en/

For more information on the regional campaigns please go to: www.emro.who.int