



Polio

What is Polio?

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

Where is polio found?

There are four countries in the world that have wild (naturally occurring) polio: [Afghanistan](#), [India](#), [Nigeria](#) and [Pakistan](#). Unfortunately, as polio has not been eradicated from these four countries, polio continues to spread to other countries.

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.

You can check to see if you are visiting a country has polio by looking at [NaTHNaC's country information pages](#) at: http://www.nathnac.org/ds/map_world.aspx

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 possible.

How do you get polio?

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. This is called Post Polio Syndrome.

How can I prevent polio?

- Make sure you and your family have had polio vaccine.
- Do not take babies and young children anywhere with a polio risk until they have completed **ALL** their routine baby vaccines, including polio.
- Follow [strict food, water and personal hygiene guidelines](#).
- Don't swim in water unless it has been chlorinated (for example a swimming pool).
- Avoid any contact with water contaminated with sewage.

Can polio be treated?

There is no specific drug or medicine to treat polio, and there is always a risk of permanent paralysis and even death. However, a safe and effective vaccine is available in the United Kingdom.

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.

Links

Health Protection Agency:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/Polio/>



National Travel Health Network and Centre Country Information Pages:

http://www.nathnac.org/ds/map_world.aspx

NHS Choices:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Polio-and-post-polio-syndrome-/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/topics/poliomyelitis/en/>