



Polio

(Poliomyelitis)

Fact Sheet

What is Polio?

Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a highly infectious viral disease caused by the **poliovirus**. It primarily affects children under 5 years of age but can impact people of any age. In severe cases, polio can cause permanent paralysis or even death.

How Polio Spreads

- **Person-to-person contact**
- **Fecal-oral route** (through contaminated water or food)
- Occasionally through **oral or respiratory secretions**
- The virus multiplies in the intestine and can invade the nervous system.

Symptoms

Most people infected with poliovirus have **no symptoms**. However, some may experience:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Stiffness in the neck
- Pain in the limbs

In about 1 in 200 infections, the virus leads to **irreversible paralysis**, usually in the legs. Among those paralyzed, 5–10% die when their breathing muscles become immobilized.

Is There a Cure?

There is no cure for polio, only prevention. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms and providing supportive care.

Prevention: The Polio Vaccine

- The **polio vaccine** is safe and effective.
- It is given in multiple doses, starting in infancy.
- Widespread vaccination has led to a **99% reduction in global polio cases** since 1988.
- There are two types of vaccines:
 - **Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)** – used in the U.S. and many other countries
 - **Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV)** – used in some global immunization campaigns

Current Status

- **Polio has been eliminated** in most of the world, but it is still **endemic in two countries**: Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Isolated outbreaks may still occur in under-immunized communities.
- Continued vaccination and surveillance are critical to **achieving global eradication**.

Why It Matters

- Polio eradication is within reach, but only if vaccination rates stay high.
- A single case in a polio-free country can spark an outbreak if communities are unvaccinated.
- **Maintaining strong immunization coverage protects everyone.**