

Transmission

- Touching the mouth with hands or objects (for example, toys) that are contaminated by the stools of a person infected with polio
- Drinking water or food contaminated by the stools of a person infected with polio

Symptoms

- Starts with fever, tiredness, headache, vomiting, stiffness of the neck or back, or pain or stiffness in the arms or legs
- Symptoms of “acute flaccid paralysis” or AFP are: sudden loss of reflexes (movement), severe muscle aches or weakness, and loose and floppy arms and legs
- About one in 200 people with polio is permanently paralysed (unable to move)
- Among those paralysed, up to a tenth (10 per cent) die because the virus affects the muscles that help them breathe

Prevention

- Routine vaccination
- Hand washing with soap (especially after using the toilet or cleaning a child)
- Use of appropriate sanitation facilities (sound, clean latrines with proper faecal sludge management)
- Social mobilization and behaviour change communication

Vulnerable people

- Children who are not vaccinated are most at risk.
- Children living in areas with poor hygiene, sanitation and water infrastructure and services.



If an epidemic occurs

- Promote mass vaccination campaigns
- Initiate community-based surveillance
- Rapidly detect and refer suspected cases to health facilities
- Increase social mobilization and behaviour change communication
- Promote handwashing with soap (especially after using the toilet, defecating, or cleaning a child)
- Promote use of appropriate sanitation facilities (sound, clean latrines that are well maintained and have proper faecal sludge management)
- Promote safe, clean drinking water (including a clean, covered water container in the household)

Community-based assessment - questions

Make a map of the community and mark the information you gather on the map. Record other details.

- When did the person first experience acute flaccid paralysis (AFP)?
- How many people have experienced acute flaccid paralysis?
- How many people have fallen sick with other polio symptoms? Where?
- Was that person fully vaccinated against polio?
- How many people live in the affected community?
- How many children under 15 years old live in the affected community?
- Are children in the affected community vaccinated for polio (orally or by injectable vaccine)? How many are not?
- Do strong cultural beliefs or perceptions about vaccination prevent children from being vaccinated?
- Who and where are the vulnerable people?
- Are there any health services? Where?
- Have the health services been alerted to a potential polio case?
- Is a vaccination campaign planned?
- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources of information do people use most?
- Are rumours or is misinformation about the disease spreading in the community?

Volunteer actions

See the following action tools for more information on what actions to take against polio:

- 1 - Community-based surveillance
- 2 - Community mapping
- 3 - Communicating with the community
- 4 - Referral to health facilities
- 5 - Volunteer protection and safety
- 12 - Managing fever
- 19 - Psychosocial support (Psychological first aid (PFA))
- 24 - Routine vaccinations

- 25 - Mass vaccination campaigns
- 29 - Hygiene promotion
- 30 - Clean, safe household water
- 31 - Good food hygiene
- 32 - Sanitation
- 33 - Building and maintaining latrines
- 34 - Handwashing with soap
- 43 - Social mobilization and behaviour change