

Polio

Polio is an infection caused by a virus. Polio causes fever, vomiting and muscle stiffness.

It's very rare today because vaccines can prevent the spread of polio.

Polio in Ireland

The chances of getting polio in Ireland are very small.

Vaccination for polio started in 1957. The last recorded case of wild polio in Ireland was in 1984. Polio was eradicated in Europe in 2003.

But the infection is still found in other parts of the world. This means there is a very small risk that polio could be brought back to Ireland through travel.

There's no cure for polio. It's important that you and your children get vaccinated against it.

► [What we mean by wild polio](#)

Polio vaccine

The polio vaccine is free as part of the childhood vaccination programme in Ireland. It's given by injection in 4 separate doses.

The doses are usually given at ages:

- 2, 4 and 6 months as part of the 6-in-1 vaccine
- 4 to 5 years as part of the 4-in-1 vaccine

[Vaccines for your child](#)

You can get vaccinated at any time if you:

- never got the vaccine
- did not get all of your vaccine doses
- had polio in the past

There are 3 types of poliovirus. If you had the infection before, you are only immune to 1 type.

Check before you travel

Before you travel, check if there's a risk of polio in the country that you plan to visit.

[Polio dashboard - ecdc.europa.eu](https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/polio)

If there is a risk, ask your GP or private travel clinic about protection against polio. You may need to get a booster dose if your last dose of the vaccine was over 10 years ago.

You may need proof of polio vaccination to enter or leave some countries.

[Overseas travel advice - Ireland.ie](https://www.doh.gov.ie/en/overseas-travel-advice)

How polio is spread

Polio is caused by a virus.

You can become infected with the poliovirus if you come into contact with:

- the poo of someone with the infection
- food or water that is contaminated with infected poo
- droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes - this is rare

Infected people can start to spread the virus about a week before any symptoms show. They can spread the virus for several weeks. Infected people who do not have any symptoms can still pass on polio to others.

Symptoms of polio

Most people with polio do not have any symptoms.

Some people experience symptoms similar to the flu for 3 to 21 days after infection.

Symptoms can include:

- [a fever \(high temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above\)](#)
- [a sore throat](#)
- a headache
- [tummy pain](#)
- aching muscles
- [feeling and being sick](#)

These symptoms usually pass within a week.

In rare cases, more serious symptoms develop.

Severe symptoms include:

- meningitis
- paralysis - when you cannot move your muscles, usually in the legs

Movement often slowly returns over weeks and months. But if your breathing muscles are affected, polio can be life-threatening.

Call 112 or 999 or go to your nearest emergency department (ED)

if you or your child:

- cannot move part or all of your body - the body part may feel stiff, floppy or numb
- have problems breathing

 **Find an
ED**

Contact your GP if

you or your child have flu-like symptoms and you:

- you're worried about your child's symptoms
- you're age 65 or older
- you're pregnant
- you have a long-term medical condition - for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease
- you have a weakened immune system - for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV
- your symptoms do not improve after 7 days

Treating polio

There's no cure for polio. Treatment can reduce the risk of long-term problems while the body fights the infection.

Treatment can include:

- bed rest in a hospital
- painkillers
- breathing support

Regular stretches or exercises can prevent problems with the muscles and joints.

Long-term problems caused by polio

Polio can sometimes cause long-term or permanent difficulties.

A few people with the infection can have some permanent paralysis. Others may have problems that need long-term treatment and support.

These problems can include:

- muscle weakness
- atrophy (shrinking of the muscles)
- contractures (tight joints)
- deformities, such as twisted feet or legs

Long-term treatment can include:

- physiotherapy to help with any movement problems
- devices such as splints and braces to support weak limbs or joints
- occupational therapy to help you adapt to any difficulties
- surgery to correct any deformities

Some people who had polio can get symptoms again or their existing symptoms can get worse. This can happen many decades after the infection. This is called post-polio syndrome and is very rare.

Support for polio

Polio Survivors Ireland provides information and support services for survivors of polio.

Phone: [01 889 8920](tel:018898920)

Email: info@polio.ie

Website: polio.ie

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