

# **Polio and OPV FAQ**

## **What is polio?**

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease that is caused when a person is infected by the polio virus that invades the nervous system. Poliomyelitis can cause paralysis and even death.

There are 3 types of the polio virus – type 1, type 2, and type 3. All types cause paralysis, which is incurable.

## **Who is most at risk of getting polio?**

The polio virus can affect anyone who has not been fully immunized; however, children under 5 years of age are particularly vulnerable. It can also affect adolescents and adults.

## **How is polio transmitted?**

The polio virus enters the body through the mouth when one eats food or drinks water that is contaminated with faecal matter from a person who carries the polio virus. The virus multiplies in the intestines and is passed through faeces.

## **What are the symptoms of polio?**

Fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, pain in the limbs, and weakness in the limbs

## **What are the signs of polio?**

If a child, adolescent, or adult suddenly shows signs of a floppy or weak arm or leg, then community leaders and health authorities should be informed immediately.

## **Is there a cure for polio?**

No, there is no cure for polio.

## **Can polio be prevented?**

Yes, polio can be prevented by immunizing a child with a vaccine.

## **What is OPV?**

OPV is a polio vaccine that protects people against three types of the polio virus that can cause poliomyelitis.

## **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 is immunized against polio.

## **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 new-borns. It has been used all over the world to protect children against polio, saving at least 5 million children from permanent paralysis by polio.

## **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. 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. Until a child is fully immunized he/she is still at risk from polio. This just emphasizes the need to

ensure that all children are immunized during every round of National Immunization Days. Every missed child is a place for the poliovirus to hide.

### **Is OPV safe for sick children and new-borns?**

Yes. OPV is safe to be given to sick children. In fact it is particularly critical that sick children and new-born babies are immunized because their immunity levels are lower than other children.

### **Will OPV also protect against other diseases?**

Mothers and caretakers should remember that the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) is not a vaccination or treatment for other childhood illnesses. Parents should ensure their children are routinely immunized against all common childhood diseases.

### **Is (name of country) the only country with polio?**

No. Polio still exists in a few countries. In Central African region, Cameroon is affected. In West Africa, Nigeria is also affected. But polio almost gone from the world. In 1988, governments launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to banish polio to the history books. Immunization campaigns have reduced polio cases worldwide by over 99 per cent. Many countries like India have eliminated poliovirus by immunizing all children several times. But because the poliovirus remains in Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan, it can travel and infect children in some of their neighbouring countries.

### **What is the Government doing to protect children against polio?**

The Government is working with UNICEF and the WHO in conducting National and sub-National Immunization Days (NIDs) to immunize ALL children under 5 years with oral polio vaccine and also through routine immunization. In addition to UNICEF, WHO, and several international and local agencies are helping the government to plan and run the immunization drives with an emphasis to reach the poorest and most marginalized children. These children are the most vulnerable and least likely to be immunized.

It is important that all children under five be vaccinated every time a campaign is held, and sometimes even older age groups may need to be vaccinated. Plus all children must take all routine vaccines including Polio vaccines.

ASK: In your area, where would you find the most underserved children?

Give the participants time to answer and guide them.

- It could be geographic – nomadic, peri-urban
- It could be due to economics – wealthy or poor
- It could be due to social and cultural issues – religion

### **What are National Immunization Days (NIDs)?**

National Immunization Days (NIDs) are days set aside all over the nation to immunize ALL children less than five years against polio, usually using the oral polio vaccine. Vaccinators will come to the community bringing polio vaccine for every child under five years of age. It is critical during NIDs that parents ensure EVERY child or person in targeted age groups receives the vaccine on those days.

### **Do sick children need to be vaccinated too during NIDs?**

Yes.

**If a child received a polio vaccine does during an NID, do they still get a dose during an RI?**

Yes.

**How long will we continue to have these campaigns?**

These campaigns will continue as long as polio is still a threat.

**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.

**Why should children be immunized again and again?**

If a child has received the vaccine before, then extra doses given during the National or Sub National Immunization Days (NIDs/SNIDs) will give valuable additional immunity against polio.