



# Polio Vaccination

## **What is polio?**

Poliomyelitis (polio, for short) is caused by a virus. The virus can be spread by drinking water with the polio virus in it. It can also be passed by close contact, such as kissing an infected person. Polio is a serious illness. It can cause paralysis (when you cannot move your arms and/or legs) or even death. Before the first polio vaccine was developed in the 1950s, thousands of children got polio every year. Fortunately, the use of vaccines has made polio very rare today.

## **How can polio be prevented?**

You can keep your children from getting polio by making sure they get the polio vaccine.

## **What is the polio vaccine?**

A vaccine is a medicine you take to keep you from getting a disease. The polio vaccine, also called IPV, is given by injection (a "shot"). The Sabine oral vaccine (OPV) was given by drops in the mouth.

## **When should my children be vaccinated?**

Most children get four doses of polio vaccine on this schedule:

1. First dose when they are two months old.
2. Second dose when they are four months old.
3. Third dose when they are six to eighteen months old.
4. Last dose when they are four to six years old.

## **Are there reasons not to get polio shots?**

Your child should not get the IPV shots if he or she is behind in receiving the shots or is allergic to these medicines: neomycin, streptomycin or polymyxin B.

## **What are the risks of the vaccine?**

Vaccines carry a small risk of serious harm, such as a severe allergic reaction. IPV cannot cause polio because it does not contain the live polio virus. (This was a small risk with the old oral vaccine. The CDC has discouraged physicians in the US from using it since January 1, 2000.) Most people have no problems.

## **What if my child has a reaction to the vaccine?**

If your child has any reaction after getting the polio vaccine, call your doctor as soon as possible. In addition, if your child gets hives (swelling, itching and a burning sensation of the skin), has problems breathing, or goes into shock (becomes weak, faint, cold, clammy and sweaty), call 911 or take your child to a hospital emergency room. Be sure to tell the doctors caring for your child the day and time your child received the vaccine. Ask your doctor to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Report form with the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), or you can do it yourself by calling 1-800-822-7967.

Adapted from Polio Vaccines: what you need to know.  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997

**To get more information on this subject, talk with your family physician.**