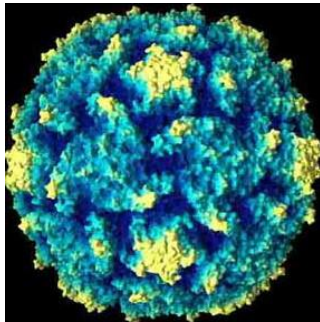


6-12 August is Polio Awareness Week



Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus (the poliovirus). Polio itself cannot be cured once someone is infected. It invades the nervous system, and sometimes can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours.

Poliomyelitis is caused by the virus, poliovirus. Children under the age of five, those who have not been vaccinated, and immuno compromised adults (those with poor immune systems) are at higher risk. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person contact, by contact with infected secretions from the nose or mouth, or by contact with infected faeces. The virus enters through the mouth and nose, spreading throughout in the body. Incubation period (the time from being infected with the virus to developing symptoms of disease) ranges from five to 35 days (average seven to 14 days).

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Treatment

It cannot be predicted who will progress from mild polio to paralysis. Each case of polio needs to be managed separately. There is no way to prevent the progression of the illness and management is aimed at controlling the symptoms and keeping the person alive by starting rehabilitation early. There is no antiviral medication to treat polio. Treatment revolves around managing the symptoms. Polio cases are treated in hospital and careful measures are taken to prevent the spreading of infection.

- Pain killers are used to reduce headache, muscle pain, and spasms.
- Moist heat (heating pads, warm towels, etc.) may reduce muscle pain and spasms.
- Physical therapy with braces or corrective shoes, orthopaedic surgery, or similar interventions may eventually be necessary to maximise recovery of muscle strength and function.
- Life saving measures, particularly assistance with breathing, may be necessary in severe cases.



Vaccination

Polio vaccine is routinely given to all children. It should also be given if you are travelling to a polio area. It is given as mouth drops.

The SA Department of Health recommends that children under the age of five be immunised against the most common childhood diseases. In 2006 the overall routine immunisation coverage for South Africa was less than 80% and some districts still had less than 60% immunisation coverage.

The last case of polio was reported in South Africa in 1989. But as long as there are still cases of wild poliovirus anywhere in the world, polio can easily be imported and spread within another polio free country if all children have not been fully vaccinated.

*Use the following link to find a
clinic near you:
[http://www.health-e.org.za/south-
african-health-facilities/](http://www.health-e.org.za/south-african-health-facilities/)*