



## What is polio?

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

## Who is most at risk for polio?

Poliovirus usually affects children under 5 years of age who are unvaccinated or under-vaccinated. The virus can also affect or be carried by adolescents and adults.

The child or individual suspected of polio may complain of sudden onset of weakness of arms and/or legs.

## Is there a cure for polio? Can it be prevented?

There is **no cure** for polio. The disease can severely paralyze, or even kill, an infected child.

Polio **can** be prevented by immunizing a child with appropriate vaccination. There are currently two effective polio vaccines, the inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) and the live attenuated oral polio vaccine (OPV).



photo credit: Ms Lei Lei Mon, WHO Myanmar

**A child receives oral polio vaccine at Thandaung township, Kayin State, 21 July 2019**

**Oral polio vaccine is the vaccine recommended for polio eradication**

## Is the polio vaccine safe?

Oral polio vaccine is one of the safest vaccines ever developed. It is so safe it can be given to sick children and newborns. Since 1961, when oral polio vaccine was introduced, **two billion children** have been immunized against polio **globally**. This is estimated to have saved at least **16 million children** from permanent paralysis by polio, **world-wide**. It is also safe to administer *multiple* doses of polio vaccine to children. Every extra dose means a child gets extra protection against polio.

## Myanmar rolls out supplementary immunization to protect children against polio

In July 2019, the polio surveillance system of Myanmar detected a vaccine derived poliovirus outbreak in Hpa Pun Township of Kayin State. This is a township where immunization coverage is low. In order to stop any poliovirus transmission, Myanmar's national and state health authorities, in close collaboration with WHO, Unicef, Ethnic health organizations and partners, and Thailand's Ministry of Public Health, are providing oral polio vaccine to all children under five years of age in areas where the chance of polio infection is high (i.e. where immunization coverage is low). Multiple doses are necessary to protect children from polio in addition to vaccination given during routine immunization. With few rounds of polio vaccination campaigns, this outbreak can be stopped.



## Is it advisable to immunize children with polio vaccine again?

Yes, if a child received the vaccine before, extra doses given during vaccination campaigns will give valuable additional immunity against polio. Polio vaccine has no harm when administered multiple times. Until a child is fully immunized, there is still a risk from polio. Hence, regardless of campaign doses, routine immunizations should be continued in any event completed timely.



photo credit: Ms Lei Lei Mon,  
WHO Myanmar

**A child shows her vaccination card, Thandaung township, Kayin State, 21 July 2019**

## What is vaccine-derived polio virus and circulating vaccine derived polio virus (cVDPV)?

A VDPV is a very rare strain of poliovirus, genetically changed from the original strain contained in oral polio vaccine. It can happen in areas of low immunization coverage. Hence communities who are *under-immunized* and lack access to adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities are vulnerable to possible spread of vaccine-derived poliovirus.

**Low vaccination coverage is a major risk factor for circulating vaccine derived polio virus (cVDPV) emergence.**

**The problem is not the vaccine itself but low vaccination coverage.**

## Outbreak Response for cVDPV

It is important to employ a robust emergency response to curtail a possible spread of circulating vaccine derived polio virus.

It can be stopped with **2-3 rounds** of high-quality, large-scale supplementary immunization activities.

## What all of us can do

Parents - indeed all members of the public - can help polio eradication efforts in the following ways:

- ensuring children are vaccinated both during polio campaigns and during on-going immunization activities
- report any children who have missed polio vaccination to health staff and community volunteers
- tell a friend or neighbour about ongoing polio campaigns and importance of routine immunizations
- report any suspected symptoms of polio, for example sudden weakness of limbs, sudden inability to walk.

## Next planned polio supplementary immunization in Myanmar

Two rounds of rapid response immunization have already conducted at **12 townships** (all **7 townships** from **Kayin State**, **3 townships** from **Mon State** and **2 townships** from **Bago Region**) in **July 2019**.

Two large scale, supplementary polio immunization rounds will be conducted at **98 priority townships** including **12 high vulnerable townships**, targeting **1.2 million** children under five years old. The first one is scheduled **4-6 and 26-28 August 2019** and the second one during **October-November 2019**.