

WORKING TOGETHER ON THE POLIO VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

WHAT ROLE CAN THE PUBLIC PLAY IN POLIO ERADICATION IN PNG?

Members of the public have the following responsibilities: ensuring their children are vaccinated both during polio campaigns and routine immunization activities; reporting any children who have missed polio vaccination to the nearest health facility; telling friends / neighbors about the ongoing polio campaigns and importance of routine immunizations; reporting any immunization refusals within their communities; and reporting any suspected cases of polio disease to their health worker.

WHAT SHOULD THE MEDIA, COMMUNITY LEADERS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY DO TO SUPPORT POLIO ERADICATION ACTIVITIES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA?

- ✓ Inform the public about the dates of polio vaccination campaigns and the benefits of polio immunization.
- ✓ Provide the public with accurate information relating to polio immunization.
- ✓ Encourage people to embrace routine immunization.
- ✓ Work with the health authorities and other partners to support polio eradication programs.



World Health Organization



**PAPUA NEW GUINEA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

WHAT IS POLIO?



WHAT IS POLIO?

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease caused by poliovirus - a virus which affects mostly young children. The virus enters the body through the gastrointestinal tract and invades the nervous system, and can cause paralysis or even death in a matter of hours. There is no cure for polio - it can only be prevented by vaccination.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

The virus is transmitted through the faeco-oral route from one person to another. A child with poliovirus sheds the virus in their stools / faeces ("pek-pek") and when water, food or hands get contaminated by such stools ("pek-pek"), the virus enters the body of another child and multiplies in the intestine. From here it can attack the nervous system. The virus can spread very quickly in places with poor hygiene and sanitation, open defecation, and overcrowding.

If all children are fully immunized against polio, the virus is unable to find susceptible children to infect and dies out.

Most people infected with the poliovirus have no signs of illness and are never aware they have been infected. These symptomless people carry the virus in their intestines and can 'silently' spread the infection to thousands of others before the first case of polio paralysis emerges.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF POLIO?

One in every 200 persons infected with polio virus develops irreversible Paralysis, usually in the legs and arms. Among those paralyzed, 5%-10% die when their breathing muscles are immobilized by the virus.

WHO IS AT RISK OF POLIO?

- Polio mainly affects children. The younger the child, the lower the immunity. Newborn and infants (below 2 years of age) are most vulnerable.
- Children up to 15 years old are more vulnerable.
- Children above 15 years old and adults are least vulnerable.
- It is rare that adults get polio symptoms, but they can still transmit the polio virus without getting the disease.

IS THE POLIO VACCINE SAFE FOR NEWBORNS?

The polio vaccine is safe for newborns, even if they have been born a few hours ago. The younger the child, the higher is the risk of getting the virus and develop poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis).

SHOULD A CHILD WHO IS SICK WITH FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS BE VACCINATED?

Vaccines are safe even if the child is suffering from fever, cough, or diarrhea. The polio vaccine has no harmful effect on these sick children, nor does it have any interaction with any medication that the child may have been prescribed with these illnesses. However, if the child has fever with a temperature equal to or over 38.5 degree Celsius, and if the mother resists vaccination, it is better to postpone and advise the mother to come back for the child to receive the dose.

DO VACCINES GIVEN TO CHILDREN CARRY THE MARK OF '666', AND DO THEY CAUSE BRAIN DAMAGE IN CHILDREN WHO RECEIVE IT?

No. Vaccines do not carry any substances that can cause brain damage in children. All vaccines, including the polio vaccine, that are given under the National Immunization Programme are pre-qualified by WHO to ensure a high standard of safety and effectiveness.

When a child is vaccinated, the vaccine helps the body to produce antibodies. These antibodies protect the child from getting the infection or illness caused by bacteria and viruses.

The following vaccines protect the child from brain infection: BCG (prevents TB); meningitis Pentavalent (Hib component prevents bacterial meningitis); and PCV13 (prevents bacterial meningitis).

Children who are not vaccinated at an early age become vulnerable to infection and may develop lifelong disabilities such as paralysis caused by poliomyelitis, brain infection, and pneumonia, and even risk death.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IMMUNIZE CHILDREN AGAIN AND AGAIN WITH OPV?

The Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) requires multiple doses to achieve complete immunity in the child. It requires a minimum of 6-8 doses for the child to achieve full protection and immunity. The younger the child, the lower their immunity, with newborns and infants (below 2 years of age) being most vulnerable. Children above 15 years are the least vulnerable. It is rare that adults get polio symptoms, but they can still transmit the polio virus without getting the disease.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE VACCINE AGAINST POLIO IS SAFE?

The polio vaccine, whether offered during campaigns or for routine Immunization, is safe and effective. The Government of Papua New Guinea (through the NDOH) has overall responsibility to ensure that all vaccines used in PNG are safe. The vaccines for PNG are supplied through UNICEF for both routine immunization and for campaigns are the same ones used all over the world and are prequalified by the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHERE TO GO FOR VACCINATION?

- The vaccination is being given in all Government health centers, hospitals and clinics, as well as health facilities run by churches and CSOs free of cost.
- Additionally, there are community outreach teams which are visiting every locality/village to provide OPV as part of the Polio Outbreak Response.
- For young children who have already received the polio vaccination during routine immunization, these additional doses should also be taken at EVERY ROUND TO BOOST THEIR IMMUNITY FURTHER.