

August 19, 2022

Dear Residents of Rockland County:

On July 21, 2022,¹ a case of paralytic polio was identified in Rockland County, New York. New Yorkers should know that paralysis from polio is typically permanent, resulting in life-long disability. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates of those paralyzed by polio, 5-10% die when their breathing muscles become immobilized.²

This diagnosis of polio was confirmed by laboratory testing performed by the New York State Department of Health's Wadsworth Laboratory and also by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The travel history of the case makes it clear that this infection was acquired locally. Evidence of the circulation of the polio virus is also supported by the fact that the same strain of polio found in this case has been found in Rockland County's wastewater (sewage).

This is an urgent plea: Anyone who is not fully immunized against polio, and especially children, should get vaccinated now. The polio vaccine is safe and has been used for more than 60 years.

As the CDC reported in their scientific publication,³ “Even a single case of paralytic polio represents a public health emergency in the United States.” This is because one symptomatic case means that there may be hundreds more unidentified. While polio is most known for the debilitating symptoms it can cause, many New Yorkers do not know that some people who contract polio experience no symptoms, 25% experience mild or flu-like symptoms, and about 1% develop severe symptoms, including paralysis.⁴ This means that asymptomatic spread in New York is likely, and of enormous concern. New Yorkers should not take comfort in the fact that some people will not experience symptoms from polio; this only makes the danger of this life-threatening virus invisible until the irreversible occurs. Your community members must not wait. **Now is the time for every adult, including those who are pregnant, to ensure they and their children starting at 2 months of age are up to date with their polio immunizations.**

While the New York State Department of Health continues to work with local and national public health authorities to learn more, what we know already is clear: **the polio in New York today is an imminent threat to all unvaccinated New Yorkers, particularly those in Rockland County, Orange County, and New York City.** New Yorkers should know that poliovirus is detected in sewage samples because the virus is excreted through feces. Wastewater does not contaminate our drinking water, tap water, or other sources of water that the general public interacts with.

While there is no cure or specific treatment for polio, it *is* preventable through safe and effective immunization. The inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), which is the only vaccine available in the United States, is at least 99% effective among children who receive all the recommended doses.

¹ https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2022/2022-07-21_polio_rockland_county.htm

² https://www.who.int/health-topics/poliomyelitis#tab=tab_2

³ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7133e2.htm?s_cid=mm7133e2_w

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/polio/what-is-polio/>

IPV cannot cause polio, but it will protect New Yorkers of all ages, beginning at 6 weeks–2 months of age:

- All children should get four doses of the polio vaccine, with the first dose given at 6 weeks through 2 months of age, followed by one dose given at 4 months of age, 6 through 18 months old, and 4 through 6 years old.
- Adults who are unvaccinated or are unsure if they have been immunized should receive 3 doses.
- Adults who have only had 1 or 2 doses of the polio vaccine in the past should get the remaining 1 or 2 doses—it does not matter how long it has been since the earlier doses.
- Adults who are at increased risk of exposure to poliovirus and who have previously completed a routine series of polio vaccine (IPV or OPV) can receive one lifetime booster dose of IPV. At this time, increased risk includes those who may have been exposed to the individual with paralytic polio and some professional workers, including healthcare professionals.

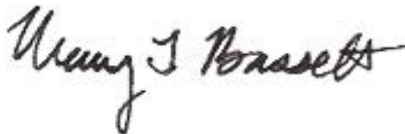
Handwashing with soap can help prevent the spread of germs. Alcohol-based sanitizers may not work well on some types of germs, like polio.

For more information on polio, the situation in New York State, and polio immunization:

- Visit health.ny.gov/polio or health.ny.gov/polio/immunization.
- Learn more about the science by visiting CDC’s publication⁵ or the New York State Department of Health’s wastewater surveillance page (www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/polio/wastewater.htm).
- Order education material by emailing BMCC@health.ny.gov.

One case of paralytic polio is already too many. The New York State Department of Health and CDC are working tirelessly to stop polio from harming New York communities further, but we cannot do this without the support of community leaders. Together, we must urge immunization—the safe protection against paralytic disease that every adult and child needs.

Sincerely,



Mary T. Bassett
Commissioner, New York State Department of Health



Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director, CDC

⁵ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7133e2.htm?s_cid=mm7133e2_w