

30 May 2014

Status: Active

## Health warning about Polio (Poliomyelitis) for international travellers

**Status:** Active

**Date issued:** 30 May 2014

**Issued by:** Dr Rosemary Lester, Chief Health Officer, Victoria

**Issued to:** Health professionals: including hospitals, travel medicine clinics, and general practices.

### Key messages

- WHO has recently declared polio to be a public health emergency of international concern.
- Unvaccinated or under-vaccinated travellers are at risk of contracting polio.
- Travellers who have not received a three-dose primary course of any polio vaccine should receive a single dose of inactivated poliomyelitis vaccine (IPV) (IPOL<sup>®</sup>) a minimum of 14 days prior to travel to reduce the risk of illness.
- Healthcare workers must ensure that they are appropriately immunised against polio.
- All children should be age-appropriately immunised against polio.
- Anyone with Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) should be considered a potential polio case and AFP in a returned traveler from a polio-affected country should be notified as suspected polio.

### What is the issue?

On Monday 5 May 2014 the WHO Director General (DG) declared the recent international spread of wild poliovirus a “public health emergency of international concern” and issued Temporary Recommendations under the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005.

Unrelated to this announcement, a probable polio case was diagnosed in a Victorian who works in the Horn of Africa. The man became ill in April while in Somalia and returned to Melbourne in May. The case is being managed by the Victorian Department of Health according to its public health guidelines. He poses no risk to the community but serves as a timely reminder of the importance of immunisation for travellers, healthcare workers and indeed all Victorians. ***As long as polio exists anywhere in the world it represents a risk to Victorians.***

### Who is at risk?

Travellers to any of the countries listed below need to be up to date with routinely recommended [vaccinations against polio](#), including a booster, and have documented evidence of this prior to departure. Documented evidence should include a completed World Health Organization International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis which are available at some travel clinics or otherwise can be ordered from the WHO (link below).

Healthcare workers who have never been immunised against polio are at particular risk if they come into contact with a polio case. Those who have not had a booster in the last ten years are also considered at risk.

Any Victorian who is unimmunised or under-immunised against polio could potentially contract it from an imported case.

## Symptoms and transmission

Polio symptoms generally appear between three and 21 days after infection. However, many people infected with poliovirus have no symptoms and may not even know they are affected.

If illness is clinically apparent, initial symptoms include fever, malaise, headache, nausea and vomiting and muscle stiffness. This can be followed in some cases by rapid onset of paralysis, usually involving limbs asymmetrically and potentially involving muscles of respiration or swallowing.

Clinicians are reminded to be vigilant for signs of poliovirus infection, including acute flaccid paralysis, in travellers returning from polio infected countries. Polio is a group A notifiable condition and medical practitioners are therefore required to notify their Department of Health immediately on suspicion, by phoning 1300 651 160.

## Prevention/treatment

### Travellers

Australian travellers are being advised to consult with their doctor regarding their vaccination requirements. As a result there may be an increase in the number of people seeking advice regarding polio vaccination related to this WHO announcement. Please refer to the [Australian Immunisation Handbook 10<sup>th</sup> Edition](#) website for information on polio vaccine administration.

The Temporary Recommendations apply to travellers from the 10 countries deemed to have active transmission of poliovirus including: Pakistan, Cameroon, Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), Afghanistan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Somalia and Nigeria and will be reviewed in 3 months.

Under these recommendations:

- countries that are currently exporting wild poliovirus (**Pakistan, Cameroon and Syria**), must ensure that travellers, including all residents and long-term visitors (greater than four weeks) have documented proof of vaccination between four weeks and 12 months prior to departure from the country.
- the other seven countries (**Afghanistan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Somalia and Nigeria**) are required to encourage all residents and long term visitors to be vaccinated against polio before international travel.

These requirements will affect Australians who visit the countries outlined for a period greater than 4 weeks.

### Healthcare Workers

All healthcare workers must ensure they are immunised against polio. Those who have never been immunised should receive three doses of IPV at least four weeks apart.

For those who have received their full childhood immunisation and who could potentially be in contact with a case, a booster dose every 10 years is strongly recommended. This can be given as dTpa-IPV where appropriate, or as IPV alone.

### Children

Children should receive IPV-containing vaccines at two, four and six months of age and a booster dose at four years of age. If no previous doses have been given, give three doses of IPV or IPV-containing vaccines at least four weeks apart.

If the third dose is administered before four years of age, give the fourth (booster) dose at either the fourth birthday or four weeks after the third dose, whichever is later. If the third dose is given after the fourth birthday, a fourth dose is not required.

## More information

### Information for clinicians

- The WHO statement - <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2014/polio-20140505/en/>
- Department of Health's poliomyelitis website - <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-poliomyelitis.htm>
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Smartraveller website - <http://smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>
- The 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the National Immunisation Handbook - <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/handbook10-4-14>
- WHO International Certificates of Vaccination - <http://apps.who.int/bookorders/anglais/detart1.jsp?sesslan=1&codlan=0&codcol=69&codcch=1000>
- The Blue Book – Guidelines for the control of infectious diseases <http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook/poliomyelitis.asp>

### Consumer information

Information for consumers is available at:

- Better Health Channel - [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Polio\\_and\\_post-polio\\_syndrome](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Polio_and_post-polio_syndrome)
- Translated polio vaccine fact sheets - <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/factsheets/language.htm>

For further information please contact the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control section at the Department of Health on 1300 651 160.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Lester PSM



Chief Health Officer

Authorised by the Victorian Government, Melbourne.