

INFANTILE PARALYSIS

Foundation Answers 10 Queries In Near-Record Year Of Polio's Scourge

NEW YORK (NEA) — Infantile paralysis threatens the nation with a siege as bad — and maybe worse — than the all-time record year of 1949.

As the cases continue to mount, doctors, local health authorities and other experts are being bombarded with questions about polio. These are the ten most frequently asked questions, authoritatively answered by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis:

1. What is the cause of polio?
Polio is short for "poliomyelitis," a disease caused by a very tiny virus, or parasitic organism.

2. How do you get polio?
By acquiring the virus, probably through your nose or mouth, from other persons with whom you have intimate contact of the sort that occurs in households. During outbreaks the virus is widespread and many people without symptoms of illness carry and are capable of transmitting the virus.

3. Why do so many people escape the disease while only a few get it?
Most people do NOT escape the infection of polio, but the vast majority of us have it without paralytic or other symptoms. If the virus is in our body—in the alimentary canal but outside the central nervous system—it does not damage nerve cells. But we develop a degree of immunity from its presence in our body. According to recent tests, about 50 per cent of the population have antibodies in their blood against one or more of the three known types of virus by the time they reach 15 years of age.

4. How can we protect our children against polio?

The National Foundation recommends a few simple precautions such as washing hands carefully before eating and after using the toilet, avoiding over-fatigue, chilling or use of other people's towels, wash cloths or dirty drinking glasses, dishes and tableware. The most important safeguard, however, is going to bed and staying there at the first sign of illness of any kind during the polio season and calling your doctor. Such a procedure is advisable because there have been so many known cases of severe paralysis, following exertion after the first symptom appeared.

5. Should we keep our children away from beaches and playgrounds?

Not if they are neighborhood or community gathering places, where the children have been going right along and are in contact with the same other children all the time. Since there are three different viruses causing polio, your children probably have already been exposed to the ones prevalent in their group. However, strangers may carry a different polio virus to which they are NOT immune. Swimming, as such, is not dangerous—it is the close association with crowds around a pool or on a beach and the tendency to become overtired or chilled that increase both chance of contact with the virus and the development of paralysis as a result of the infection.

6. Of those who get polio, how

many are crippled?

About 30 per cent, slightly, and 23 per cent severely. Some 50 per cent recover without any handicap whatsoever and perhaps 8 per cent die.

7. Why is polio such an expensive disease?

Because for those who have paralytic consequences the services of so many different kinds of specialists are required, there is costly equipment involved and the restorative period is so long. The National Foundation spent \$21,000,000 for patient care alone in 1951. Until relatively recently, polio specialists existed in such small numbers that only a few medical centers could offer complete care for polio patients. The March of Dimes over the last 14 years has made possible the training of many more of these workers, at an investment of over \$14,000,000, so that better care now is available in more places—but additional workers are urgently needed still.

8. Do poor sanitary conditions cause more paralytic polio?

Just the opposite—lack of sanitation seems to increase immunity. Children who are constantly exposed to the virus in small doses, as is true in primitive communities, seem to build up more immunity than children who are surrounded, so to speak, with a "sterile blanket." All babies are born with the same immunity possessed by their mothers. If they do not become infected with the virus, they gradually lose this immunity during the first six months of life. If they are exposed to the virus during the time when they are protected by the immunity acquired from their mothers, however, they tend to build up their own antibodies against polio, which last for a long time. If they are NOT exposed to the virus during that partially-protected period, then when they meet up with the virus later they are susceptible to paralysis.

9. How far have they got in research?

There has been more progress in the last few years than in the previous century. Since 1938 researchers have been in what may be termed a "tooling-up" stage, when vast sums were necessary to prepare the way for the discovery of a preventive or cure. Now that phase has given way to the one in which potential preventive products are being tested. A vaccine has been found effective in laboratory animals; it is still to be tested for humans. A new technique of growing polio virus in test tubes has made it possible to supply large quantities of virus for experimental work. The outlook for victory over polio is good.

10. Does the March of Dimes help everyone who has polio?

In the broad sense, yes. Hospitals have been equipped and staffed with March of Dimes funds, specialists have been trained, iron lungs and other equipment provided, and knowledge greatly increased everywhere. And, of course, nearly 4 out of every 5 patients receive direct financial assistance from their local chapters of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which have aided approximately 185,000 patients since 1938.

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