

# Polio vaccine

## Parent Information Sheet

The Australian Government makes some vaccines free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

### Q. What is polio?

Polio is a viral infection that can cause paralysis and death. Most people with polio have no symptoms. About 10% may have fever, headache, tiredness, nausea, and vomiting, but they usually recover.

In about 2% of cases, the virus causes severe muscle pain and stiffness in the back or neck. Less than 1% develop paralysis, which can affect the arms, legs, neck, or breathing muscles.

### Q. How does polio spread?

Polio spreads through contact with tiny amounts of faeces or saliva from an infected person. This can happen if hands are not washed properly.

The virus enters through the nose or mouth, infects the gut, and can spread to the blood and nervous system. People with polio are most contagious 10 days before symptoms until 10 days after symptoms appear.

### Q. How do vaccines work?

Vaccines help the immune system fight infections. If a vaccinated person is exposed to the virus, their body can fight the illness better or make it less severe.

### Q. How effective is the polio vaccine?

A full course of the polio vaccine (3 doses) is 99% effective at preventing the disease.

### Q. Who should get the vaccine?

Adolescents who have not had all 3 doses of the polio vaccine should be vaccinated.

### Q. Who should not get the vaccine?

Do not give the vaccine to people who:

- had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose
- had a severe allergic reaction to an ingredient in the vaccine.

### Q. What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a very rare but severe allergic reaction. It can cause unconsciousness or death if not treated quickly. Immunisation providers are trained to manage anaphylaxis.

### Q. What if I don't know if my child has had the polio vaccine?

If you don't have records, your child can still be safely vaccinated.

### Q. What is in the polio vaccine?

The vaccine contains small amounts of:

- phenoxyethanol, formaldehyde, and polysorbate 80
- neomycin, streptomycin, and polymyxin B
- bovine serum albumin.

These ingredients help the vaccine work or preserve it. It was also exposed to bovine-derived materials during manufacturing.

### Q. How safe are vaccines?

Vaccines in Australia are very safe. They must pass strict safety checks before approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA also monitors vaccine safety after use.

### Q. What are the side effects of the polio vaccine?

Side effects are usually mild and may include:

- redness, pain, or swelling where the shot was given
- fever.

Serious side effects are extremely rare.

For more information, check the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) at [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](http://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination). If you are concerned about side effects, contact your GP.

**Q. Can pregnant students get the vaccine?**

No. Pregnant students should not get the vaccine.

On vaccination day, nurses will ask female students if they are or could be pregnant. If a student says yes, she will not be vaccinated. She will be advised to talk to her parent or doctor and will be given contact details for a support service.

**Q. Who can give consent, and can it be withdrawn?**

Parents or guardians must give consent for students under 18. Students aged 18 and older can give their own consent by signing the Consent Form.

You can withdraw consent at any time by writing to the school or calling them.

**Q. What if my child missed the vaccine because they were sick or absent?**

If your child missed their vaccination at school, arrange a catch-up as soon as possible. Some schools offer catch-up clinics. If not, contact your GP or pharmacist to arrange the vaccination.

**Q. How can I access a record of my child's vaccinations?**

Your child's vaccination record will be added to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Parents can request their child's Immunisation History Statement until the child turns 14. Students aged 14 and older can request their own record. You can access it:

- through your Medicare online account at [my.gov.au](https://my.gov.au)
- using the Medicare Express Plus App: [servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-medicare-mobile-app](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-medicare-mobile-app)
- by calling the AIR General Enquiries Line at 1800 653 809.

**Q. What happens to my child's information?**

The information on the Consent Form is private and protected by law. It will be added to the NSW Health immunisation register and linked to the AIR so it can be viewed on MyGov.

**Q. Where can I find more information about school vaccination?**

You can find more details:

- on the NSW Health website: [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](https://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination)
- by calling your local public health unit at 1300 066 055.

## Your next steps:

- If you want your child to get the polio vaccine, complete and sign the Consent Form. Return it to the school with your child.
- If you do not want your child to get the vaccine, do not provide consent.