



Department of Health

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

JAMES V. McDONALD, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Commissioner

MEGAN E. BALDWIN
Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner

April 2023

Dear Children's Camp Operator:

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is alerting camp operators to the possibility of polio infection and transmission at children's camps. We ask for your cooperation in working with us to implement key interventions at your facility to protect all children against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs).

The risk for polio transmission in New York State is real and requires continued monitoring and prevention efforts. Every case of paralytic polio is a serious, urgent public health matter. In July 2022 a case of paralytic polio was detected in an unvaccinated young, previously healthy adult in Rockland County. Since then, surveillance for polio in wastewater has revealed silent community transmission in Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, and Nassau counties and New York City even though no additional paralytic cases have been reported. Polio is highly contagious and is easily spread, even by people with no symptoms, through contact with contaminated surfaces or pools or baths where an infected person has swum or bathed. There is no cure for polio and it can spread quickly in communities with high numbers of unvaccinated individuals.

Some unvaccinated people with polio may develop very serious symptoms that affect the brain and spinal cord:

- Paralysis (can't move parts of their body) or weakness of the arms, legs, or both. This may result in permanent disability and some people die because the virus affects the muscles that help them breathe.
- Meningitis, which is an infection of the covering of the spinal cord and/or brain.
- Children who seem to fully recover can still develop new muscle pain, weakness, or paralysis as adults, 15 to 40 years later.

The polio vaccine is safe, and it prevents serious polio disease. Most unvaccinated people who contract polio will also have no visible symptoms, but about 25% will have symptoms that last 2 to 5 days and then go away on their own. These symptoms may include:

- Sore throat
- Nausea/vomiting
- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain

What can you do to prevent polio transmission at your camp?

- 1) **Ensure that all campers and staff are up to date and have received a complete series of polio vaccination before coming to camp.** Vaccination is the best protection against polio and the New York State Department of Health strongly recommends that all individuals who will be working in or attending summer camps be vaccinated according to the CDC schedules. Children are considered fully protected against polio if they have received 4 doses of a polio-containing vaccine by age 6. Information about polio vaccination can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/polio/public/index.html> Schedules can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/>.

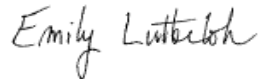
- 2) **Maintain adequate disinfection levels in pools.** The poliovirus is inactivated by chlorine and bromine, so it is very important that proper disinfection levels be maintained in communal swimming and bathing areas, including treating the water in communal religious or ceremonial baths such as mikvahs and baptismal fonts. Requirements for proper chlorine and bromine levels of swimming pools are described in Subpart 6-1 of the NYS Sanitary Code, Swimming Pools and can be found in subdivision 6-1.11(c) at <https://regs.health.ny.gov/content/section-6-111-treatment>. In areas with known polio transmission, higher disinfection levels may be recommended by your local health department. Pool staff should check disinfection residuals more frequently on hot, sunny days to ensure adequate chlorine or bromine levels, especially in shallow bodies of water such as kiddie pools.
- 3) **Encourage and practice hand hygiene.** Ensure soap and clean running water are readily available. Properly washing hands with soap and clean, running water for 20 seconds and then using clean paper towels to dry them helps prevent the spread of polio. People should always properly wash their hands before preparing or eating food, after using the toilet or changing diapers, and any time they may have become soiled. Please note that while alcohol-based hand sanitizers are still an important tool in our fight against disease transmission, they are not effective against the virus that causes polio.
- 4) **Watch closely for signs of polio infection and seek health care evaluation.** It is important to monitor for symptoms and to immediately contact your local health department if any campers or staff show signs of polio infection. Delays in reporting could lead to additional transmission, hinder diagnostic efforts, and cause campers and staff who are not immunized to be sent home, resulting in your camp having to close early for the season.
- 5) **Follow your camp's approved safety plan.** As part of a camp's approved safety plan, camps are to maintain a detailed list of staff, campers, and other individuals who are not fully immunized against vaccine preventable diseases. This list should include which disease(s) the person is not protected against and be readily available to quickly identify at-risk individuals if there is an illness at camp. The camp health director or other designated healthcare provider should provide training to staff on the symptoms of polio and other vaccine preventable diseases. All staff should understand that any sign of illness in a camper, staff, or other person present at camp must be reported to the camp health director or camp director.
- 6) **Get familiar with the polio risk in your county.** Rates of vaccination are higher in some counties than others – this information can be found at: https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/polio/county_vaccination_rates.htm.

Vaccines are a critical tool in our fight against many terrible diseases. **Operators of children's camps, as well as county health departments, have the authority to require polio and other immunizations for their campers and staff. In addition, all children's camps in New York State are required to notify campers and parents that meningococcal vaccine is recommended for and available to all campers attending overnight camps for 7 or more consecutive nights.** Children should receive their first dose of Meningococcal ACWY (MenACWY) vaccine when they are 11 or 12 years old and then a booster when they are 16 years old. Campers should not receive the MenACWY vaccine doses before the proper ages; if they do, they will need to repeat the doses prior to attending school.

All communicable diseases, including polio and other vaccine preventable diseases, are required by State Sanitary Code to be reported to the permit issuing official within 24 hours. If you suspect a case of any vaccine preventable disease, please notify your permit issuing official as soon as possible and they will work with you to implement control measures that may prevent additional cases.

Please contact your local health department for additional guidance on the prevention and control of vaccine preventable diseases in children's camps. Thank you for your partnership and efforts to keep camps free of vaccine-preventable diseases and provide a safe and healthy summer camp season for all campers and staff.

Sincerely,



Emily Lutterloh, MD, MPH
Director, Division of Epidemiology
New York State Department of Health

Recommended resources:

CDC recommended immunization schedules for children and adults:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>

Poliovirus and polio vaccination

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/polio.html#clinical-features>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/polio/public/index.html>

More information on meningococcal disease in children's camps:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/camps/meningococcal.htm>

Fact sheets about other communicable diseases:

<http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/>

NYSDOH guidance on preventing and handling VPDs at children's camps:

[Procedures for Handling Vaccine-Preventable Diseases at Camp \(ny.gov\)](#)

NYSDOH State Sanitary Code Section 6-1, Swimming Pools

<https://regs.health.ny.gov/content/subpart-6-1-swimming-pools>