

Ukraine: 10 things to know and do about polio

1. Polio virus can paralyze or kill children within a matter of hours.
2. There is no cure for the highly contagious polio virus: immunization is our only and effective protection.
3. The polio outbreak is confirmed in Ukraine by global health authorities. After a nineteen year absence, polio has returned to Ukraine. While the vulnerable will be hardest hit, the virus is highly infectious and has no respect for social status, bank balances or borders.
4. Any child who is not fully immunized is at risk and poses a threat to other children.
5. ALL children under 6 years in Ukraine must get the polio vaccine during two rounds of immunization activities planned in response to the outbreak. These rounds will be followed by one round of immunization targeting all children under 10 years. To ensure that they are fully protected, children should receive each dose of vaccination each and every time it is offered until the outbreak is stopped.
6. The oral polio vaccine (OPV) is the only effective weapon against polio when an outbreak is detected. It will protect a child for life if it is administered several times. Any child who misses a vaccination is under risk and provides another place for polio virus to hide. OPV is the only way recommended as it provides an individual and community immunity.
7. Polio eradication has been one of the most successful global public health programmes of all time – reducing wild polio virus cases by 99 per cent from 350,000 per year in 1988 to just 243 cases in 2014.
8. Polio eradication is for our common future. The whole world is working to wipe out polio. Ukraine is part of the European as well as Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a worldwide campaign that has cut polio cases by more than 99 per cent since 1988. Our children are relying on us to keep them safe.
9. The polio outbreak proves just how important routine immunization is against childhood diseases. In Ukraine, less than 50% of children were un- or under-immunized in 2014, and in 2015 the level of immunization against polio among children under 1 year of age has dropped further to 14%. The polio outbreak occurred because of the chronically low immunization coverage in the country.
10. Everyone has a role to play in bringing this vaccine to children. Families need the facts about polio and the value of immunization. Please talk to your friends and neighbors. Teach children about polio at school. Go out into your community to encourage children get immunized. There are so many ways to help and protect Ukrainian children!