

Public Health
222 Upper Street
London N1 1XR

www.islington.gov.uk

Monday 27 June 2022

Dear parent or carer,

Recent detection of the polio virus in sewage in the UK

You may have read in the news that traces of the polio virus have been detected in sewage samples in London. It is not unusual for this to occur in isolated cases and is usually the result of a person vaccinated overseas with the live oral polio vaccine returning or travelling to the UK and shedding traces of the virus in their faeces (poo).

The reason for the current concern is that the samples show there may have been some spread of polio infection between closely-linked people, for example between people within a household, in North or East London. **No actual cases of polio or polio-like symptoms have yet been identified.**

The risk to the public is low.

The polio virus can be passed from person to person through contact with faeces (poo), saliva or mucus. Most people infected with polio show no symptoms but in rare cases, in people who are not fully vaccinated, it can cause very serious disease including paralysis.

The best protection against polio is vaccination. Most of the UK population have been vaccinated in childhood, but in some communities in Islington, coverage of these vital immunisations is low.

The vaccine given in the UK is not a live vaccine (the live vaccine was stopped in 2004). It cannot shed traces of virus and cannot cause polio. The vaccine has been given safely in this form to millions of people since 2004.

Please make sure that your children are up to date with all their vaccinations. You can see the whole schedule of childhood vaccinations on the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk). The vaccinations that include the polio vaccine are:

- **Three doses to babies:** three doses of the [6-in-1 vaccine](#) at age 8, 12 and 16 weeks
- **One dose at age 3:** one dose of the [4-in-1 vaccine](#) (sometimes known as the pre-school booster) at age 3 years and 4 months
- **One dose to teenagers:** one dose of the [3-in-1 vaccine](#) (sometimes known as DTP or the teenage booster) at age 14, usually given in school

You need to have all these doses to be fully protected against polio. You can check children's vaccinations in their red book, or ring your GP practice, and book an appointment at your GP surgery to catch-up on any missed vaccinations.

If your secondary school child has missed a school vaccination, the school-age vaccination team have community catch-up clinics available after school and over the summer holidays. Call 020 8017 7925 to make an appointment.

I hope this information is useful. If you would like to know more about polio, the vaccine or other vaccine-prevented diseases, there is lots of information on the [Vaccine Knowledge Project website](#).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JEO'Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a simple horizontal line.

Jonathan O'Sullivan
Director of Public Health

If you would like this document in large print or Braille, audiotape or in another language, please telephone 020 7527 2000.