Transmission

- Touching the mouth with hands or objects (for example, toys) that are contaminated by the stools of a person infected with polio
- Drinking water or food contaminated by the stools of a person infected with polio

Symptoms

- Starts with fever, tiredness, headache, vomiting, stiffness of the neck or back, or pain or stiffness in the arms or legs
- Symptoms of “acute flaccid paralysis” or AFP are: sudden loss of reflexes (movement), severe muscle aches or weakness, and loose and floppy arms and legs
- About one in 200 people with polio is permanently paralysed (unable to move)
- Among those paralysed, up to a tenth (10 per cent) die because the virus affects the muscles that help them breathe

Prevention

- Routine vaccination
- Hand washing with soap (especially after using the toilet or cleaning a child)
- Use of appropriate sanitation facilities (sound, clean latrines with proper faecal sludge management)
- Social mobilization and behaviour change communication

Vulnerable people

- Children who are not vaccinated are most at risk.
- Children living in areas with poor hygiene, sanitation and water infrastructure and services.
A child with polio

If an epidemic occurs

- Promote mass vaccination campaigns
- Initiate community-based surveillance
- Rapidly detect and refer suspected cases to health facilities
- Increase social mobilization and behaviour change communication
- Promote handwashing with soap (especially after using the toilet, defecating, or cleaning a child)
- Promote use of appropriate sanitation facilities (sound, clean latrines that are well maintained and have proper faecal sludge management)
- Promote safe, clean drinking water (including a clean, covered water container in the household)

Community-based assessment - questions

Make a map of the community and mark the information you gather on the map. Record other details.

- When did the person first experience acute flaccid paralysis (AFP)?
- How many people have experienced acute flaccid paralysis?
- How many people have fallen sick with other polio symptoms? Where?
Was that person fully vaccinated against polio?
How many people live in the affected community?
How many children under 15 years old live in the affected community?
Are children in the affected community vaccinated for polio (orally or by injectable vaccine)? How many are not?
Do strong cultural beliefs or perceptions about vaccination prevent children from being vaccinated?
Who and where are the vulnerable people?
Are there any health services? Where?
Have the health services been alerted to a potential polio case?
Is a vaccination campaign planned?
Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
Which sources of information do people use most?
Are rumours or is misinformation about the disease spreading in the community?

Volunteer actions

See the following action tools for more information on what actions to take against polio:
1 - Community-based surveillance
2 - Community mapping
3 - Communicating with the community
4 - Referral to health facilities
5 - Volunteer protection and safety
12 - Managing fever
19 - Psychosocial support (Psychological first aid (PFA))
24 - Routine vaccinations
25 - Mass vaccination campaigns
29 - Hygiene promotion
30 - Clean, safe household water
31 - Good food hygiene
32 - Sanitation
33 - Building and maintaining latrines
34 - Handwashing with soap
43 - Social mobilization and behaviour change