



How Many Polio Survivors *ARE* there?

A Bruno Byte “Tidbit”

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Question: My sister had paralytic polio and I had what the doctor said was the flu at the same time. Could my "flu" have been a mild case of polio?

Answer: If the poliovirus entered the nervous system there was no mild “case.” From the research of Dr. David Bodian in the 1940s, the poliovirus killed brain stem (bulbar) neurons even if it didn't affect the spinal cord. And you had to have 60% of your spinal cord motor neurons killed to have any evidence of paralysis!

Here's another stat. We went through the Mayo Clinic's Olmsted county data base. We found data that indicates there are 150,000 Americans who had polio (usually siblings of paralytic polio survivors) who were never diagnosed, not even as having "non-paralytic" polio or the "summer grippe."

Finally, 1909 to 1955 more than 2000 family members in over 1000 households were surveyed in which at least one person had polio. On average if one child in a household became ill he "shared" polio with one other sibling of similar age. I say "he" because more boys had polio than did girls. Just over half of those who became ill were paralyzed, while the others had flu-like symptoms ranging from a fever, sore throat and nausea to a stiff neck and muscle pain. This "minor illness" was caused by the poliovirus but may never have been diagnosed as polio at all, or may have been called "abortive" or "non-paralytic" polio. In three-quarters of the households the first case of polio was paralytic and the second was "non-paralytic." Bottom line: there's about a 1-in-5 chance that if you had paralytic polio one of your brothers or sisters had non-paralytic polio and may not even have know it.

Bottom line:

- Poliovirus did lots of damage whether or not you had muscle weakness or paralysis.
- There's about a 1-in-5 chance that if you had paralytic polio one of your brothers or sisters had non-paralytic polio and may not even have know it.
- We have no idea – and will never know -- how many people had polio.

The Encyclopedia of Polio and Post-Polio Sequelae

contains all of [Dr. Richard Bruno's](#) articles, monographs, commentaries and “Bruno Bytes”
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