



Polio. It's happened again, right here in the US.

The July announcement of a 20 year-old man from Rockland County, NY, paralyzed by the poliovirus, brings back memories of the fear, disability and death that came each summer with the polio epidemics. *How* can polio be happening here? We have had an injectable polio vaccine (IPV) that is 99% effective available to *all* children in the US since 2000. Vaccines can't do their job if people don't take them, and the young man from New York was not vaccinated. That's why polio is happening again.

Initial reports indicate that his paralysis was caused by a mutation of the oral Type 2 poliovirus vaccine (OPV), a mutation that occasionally causes the vaccine to result in paralysis. The oral polio vaccines have not been given in the US since 2000, suggesting that the chain of transmission of this contagious disease began abroad. The CDC and WHO have reported the virus that infected him is genetically related to the vaccine-derived poliovirus recently found in London and Israeli sewage (like the US, they are countries that have seen the eradication of polio). The paralyzed man must have come in close contact with someone who had received the oral Type 2 polio vaccine outside the US.

For polio survivors, this case in NY is horribly sad and deeply personal. Sad because the injectable polio vaccine, the *only* vaccine given in the US, is 99% effective in its protection against all three types of polio. If *only* he had been vaccinated, the man who was paralyzed never would have become ill at all. Even sadder is that he will have to live with a disability and chances are high that he will experience and become even more disabled as a result of Polio Syndrome (PPS) - the late effects of polio - as he ages.

Why is one case of polio deeply personal? Because lack of vaccination has added one more *preventable* case of polio paralysis to the WHO estimated 20 *million* polio survivors, 75%+ of whom will develop PPS. Survivors of this disease will always remember:

- Those who died.
- The terror that came with being so sick.
- Lonely months and years of hospitalization, surgeries and painful rehabilitation all while separated from parents and siblings.
- The frightening reality of an iron lung.
- The sorrow that came with discovering wheelchairs, leg braces and crutches were ours for life.
- The loneliness that came as we returned home, and were forced to accept that everyone around us knew that it was the home of a "cripple", and parents kept their children away.
- The shock that has come with the reality of the long-haul effects of polio (PPS), when those of us who thought we escaped or recovered from paralysis find ourselves with new weakness, fatigue and pain as we age.

(["In Our Own Words"](#) is a page on our website that features brief stories and videos of the realities of this terrible disease.)

Yes, the story of this young man's suffering is sad and deeply personal. Even *one* unvaccinated person with polio is one too many. His pain is completely unnecessary. The miracle of the polio vaccines came too late for us and for the millions of others who are living with polio's effects.

We celebrate [Rotary International's focus on disease prevention](#) and the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#) for their determined efforts to rid the world of polio and educate parents about the gift of modern vaccines. In spite of these determined eradication efforts overseas, polio *is* happening in the US.

Please choose to vaccinate. No one needs to suffer from the effects of polio, ever again.

The foreign origin of the poliovirus that paralyzed the unvaccinated man in New York is a painful reminder that polio (and many vaccine preventable diseases) are only a plane ride away.

Richard L. Bruno, HD, PhD
Director, International Centre for Polio Education

and

Carol Ferguson
Representing the PA Polio Survivors Network