



Public Health
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Ontario County, NY

Ontario County Public Health

Polio in Rockland County, 2022



Prior to the vaccine era, polio took a huge toll on children throughout the world. Most recovered without difficulty, but some died, and some were paralyzed for life. Perhaps you remember pictures of kids in iron lungs or wearing leg braces back in the 40's. Or maybe an image of FDR in a wheelchair*. There are older adults alive today with mobility issues related to childhood polio.

When an effective polio vaccine became available, parents breathed a collective sigh of relief. Since 1979, no cases of polio have originated in the US.

So, what's this about a recent case in Rockland County and the presence of the virus in wastewater?

The case diagnosed in Rockland County this summer was vaccine-variant polio. Vaccine-associated infections can occur when oral polio vaccine is used. It can occur in the person vaccinated, or in an unvaccinated close contact. To prevent this from happening, oral polio vaccine is no longer used in the US. This isn't true for every country.

Where there's one case, there could be more. The NYSDOH has been testing wastewater in Rockland County to determine how concerned, residents should be. Evidence of the virus was found in a June sample. This means someone (could be more than one person) is shedding polio virus when they go to the bathroom.

Rockland County's childhood vaccination rate for polio (60%) is lower than the state average (79%). Polio is very contagious and spreads quickly. With only 6 in 10 children up to date on vaccine, Rockland may be seeing more cases.

In the realm of communicable disease, the world has become a small place. We tend to take our immunity for granted. That immunity, however, comes most often from vaccines. When we don't vaccinate, the only thing separating us from potential illness is an airplane ride.

Stay up to date on vaccines. This goes for adults and children. Right now, polio is in the news; next month it could be measles. Don't risk getting something from which you or your child may not fully recover.

More information: <https://tinyurl.com/3a57xaur>

*Polio is the disease that left Franklin D. Roosevelt wheelchair-bound and resulted in the creation of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP) which in 1979 became the March of Dimes (<http://www.polioplace.org/people/franklin-delano-roosevelt>). Recent studies suggest that FDR's symptoms could have been a result of Guillain-Barré, a much more uncommon and poorly understood disease at the time (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26508622/>). Either way, millions have benefited from the work of the NFIP, March of Dimes, and the development of polio vaccine.