

Stockholm 2025-02-10

To: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Subject: The Role of Clean Hands in Preventing the Spread of Poliovirus

Dear ECDC,

We recently came across the statement shared by ECDC (pub. 3rd of Feb) on LinkedIn emphasizing vaccination as the only effective protection against poliovirus. While we fully acknowledge and support the critical role of vaccination in preventing polio, we believe it is essential to recognize that an effective disease prevention strategy requires a multifaceted approach.

Hygiene and hand cleanliness are fundamental components in reducing the transmission of infectious diseases, including polio. Poliovirus is primarily spread via the fecal-oral route, meaning that proper hand hygiene, access to clean water, and improved sanitation are key measures in breaking the chain of transmission. Without these, the risk of spreading the virus remains, even in vaccinated populations.

Rather than limiting the discussion to a single method, we must embrace a broader perspective that incorporates multiple protective measures. Encouraging good hygiene habits, including effective hand cleaning through both washing and disinfection, alongside vaccination strengthens our collective ability to reduce infections and safeguard public health more effectively.

We urge public health organizations to emphasize the importance of clean hands, including both washing and disinfection, in their communication, complementing the vital role of vaccination. A comprehensive approach ensures that we do not overlook simple yet powerful preventive measures that contribute to a healthier society.

We appreciate your efforts in public health advocacy and welcome further dialogue on this critical issue.

Best regards,

Anders Karlsson

Chairman

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) ✓
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Detections of poliovirus in sewage samples require enhanced routine and catch-up vaccination and increased surveillance to keep Europe polio-free.

Between September and December 2024, four countries in the EU/EEA (Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain) and the United Kingdom reported detections of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in sewage samples.

This is the first time cVDPV2 has been detected in EU/EEA countries from environmental surveillance.

Keeping Europe polio-free

To date, no human polio cases have been reported and the EU/EEA continues to be polio-free, but such findings call for increased vigilance.

Laboratory analyses likely indicate that the virus has been repeatedly introduced from an unknown area where that specific form of the virus is still in circulation. These recent importations may pose a threat to public health in the EU/EEA and should be monitored closely according to a Rapid Risk Assessment published today by ECDC on this topic.

"Europe has been polio-free for more than 20 years. We have to remain vigilant, maintain high vaccination rates and close any vaccination gaps that exist to prevent any return of this serious disease" - said Pamela Rendi-Wagner, ECDC Director.

Vaccines - the only protection

Poliovirus is highly infectious and can be transmitted easily and silently across wide geographical areas. Therefore, while the EU/EEA continues to remain polio-free, it is vital to maintain adequate vaccine-induced immunity. Polio is a potentially debilitating disease and no specific therapy is available against the virus. Vaccination is the only effective method of protecting against severe disease caused by poliovirus.