Polio in Laos, Alert, Level 2

What is the current situation?

On October 8, 2015, the government of Laos notified the World Health Organization of a case of polio. CDC recommends that all travelers to Laos be fully vaccinated against polio. In addition, adults who have been fully vaccinated should receive a single lifetime booster dose of polio vaccine.

What is polio?

Polio is a disease caused by a virus that affects the nervous system and is mainly spread by person-to-person contact. Polio can also be spread by drinking water or other drinks or eating raw or undercooked food that are contaminated with the feces of an infected person.

Most people with polio do not feel sick. Some people have only minor symptoms, such as fever, tiredness, nausea, headache, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, stiffness in the neck and back, and pain in the arms and legs. Most people recover completely. In rare cases, polio infection causes permanent loss of muscle function in the arms or legs (usually the legs); if there is loss of function of the muscles used for breathing or infection of the brain, death can occur.

What can travelers do to prevent polio?

- Get the polio vaccine:
  - Ask your doctor or nurse to find out if you are up-to-date with your polio vaccination and whether you need a booster dose before traveling. Even if you were vaccinated as a child or have been sick with polio before, you may need a booster dose to make sure that you are protected. See individual destination pages for vaccine recommendation information.
  - Make sure children are vaccinated.
  - See Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) for more information.

- Eat safe foods and drink safe beverages: Follow the Food and Water Safety tips to avoid eating or drinking things that could be contaminated with polio.

- Practice hygiene and cleanliness:
  - Wash your hands often.
  - If soap and water aren’t available, clean hands with hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol).
  - Don’t touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. If you need to touch your face, make sure your hands are clean.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
Try to avoid close contact, such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people who are sick.

Traveler Information

- CDC Polio Homepage
- Polio Vaccine Questions and Answers
- Vaccine Information Statements (VIS)
- Food and Water Safety

Clinician Information

All travelers to any country should be up-to-date on routine vaccinations, including polio vaccine. CDC recommends a single lifetime inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) booster dose for travelers to certain countries. See the Vaccine section in Chapter 3, Poliomyelitis, CDC Health Information for International Travel, for specific vaccination details.

Additional Information

- Poliomyelitis in Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases—“Pink Book”
- Polio: Immediate Notifiable Disease