Minnesota Department of Health
Polio

What is polio?
Polio is caused by a virus that lives in the intestinal tract and sometimes in the throat. Polio was eliminated from the United States in 1979. However, polio still exists in some developing countries.

What are the symptoms of polio?
Symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. Up to 95 percent of all persons infected with polio will have no symptoms.

What health problems does polio cause?
Most people recover from polio without any problems. However, approximately 4 to 8 percent of those with polio develop health problems such as meningitis and less than 1 percent develop permanent paralysis.

How is polio diagnosed?
Polio can only be diagnosed with laboratory testing. Taking samples from the stool or throat are common ways to test for polio.

Who gets polio?
Anyone who has not been vaccinated can get the disease. Because there are people throughout the world and in the United States that are not vaccinated, it is possible that infected travelers can carry polio to unvaccinated people.

Is there a vaccine for polio?
Yes. The inactivated polio vaccine, or IPV, is very effective.
- Children usually receive three doses of IPV vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months of age.
- Booster doses are given again at 4 to 6 years of age.
- In the United States, polio vaccination is generally unnecessary for person 18 years of age or older.

- In the case of travel to areas where polio disease exists, adults should receive a booster dose.
- In the case of an outbreak in a local area, previously vaccinated persons involved in the outbreak should receive a dose of polio vaccine. If they have never been vaccinated, a three-dose series of polio vaccine is recommended.

How is polio spread?
The poliovirus is found in the stool and throat. It is spread through contact with the stool of an infected person (for instance, by changing diapers). Poliovirus must be swallowed to cause infection. This can happen when hands that are contaminated with stool are put in the mouth. The period between exposure to the virus and onset of illness is usually 6 to 20 days, but can range from 3 to 35 days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread polio?
A person with polio can spread the virus to others 7 to 10 days before and after the illness appears, but the virus can be found in the stool from 3 to 6 weeks.

What can be done to prevent the spread of polio?
Vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of polio. Widespread immunization against polio is critical to controlling the spread of the disease and preventing disability. In addition everyone should:
- Avoid close contact with others who are ill
- Stay at home if ill
- Wash hands with soap and water after toileting, changing diapers, and before preparing food and eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.