



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

Polio in Australia

Quick facts

The number of polio cases worldwide and in Australia has decreased as vaccination has increased.

Australia was declared polio free in 2000.

What is polio?

Polio (poliomyelitis) is a highly contagious viral infection caused by the poliovirus. Polio is spread mainly through contact with infected faeces (poo), leading to gastrointestinal (stomach and gut) infection.

Most people do not have any symptoms, around 10% have mild fever, headache, tiredness, nausea and vomiting. In around 3% of infected people, the virus moves to the nervous system; two-thirds of these develop severe muscle pain and one-third develop severe muscle weakness (paralytic polio). Up to 3 in 10 patients with paralytic polio die.

Currently, most of the world is free of polio, and its eradication is within reach.

Vaccination against polio

Widespread vaccination against polio was introduced in Australia in the mid 1950s, and polio vaccination was incorporated into the Australian National Immunisation Program (NIP) in 1975. Polio vaccination is available on the NIP for infants and young children.

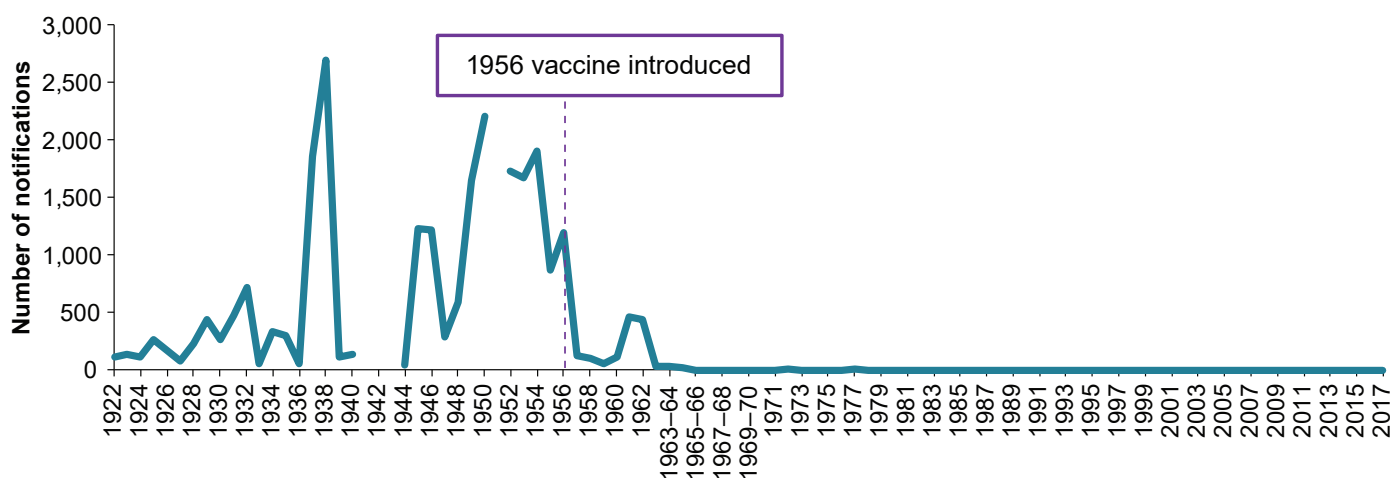
Australia was declared polio free in 2000. Although there has been no known local transmission of the poliovirus in Australia since 1972, there remains a risk of the importation of polio from overseas. For this reason, vaccination of Australian children remains critical.

In 2017, 95% of Australian 1 year olds were fully vaccinated against polio; however, vaccination rates vary by where a child lives.

Polio notifications

Polio is a nationally notifiable disease in Australia, which means that diagnosed cases of polio are reported to state or territory health departments.

Since 1987, the only case of polio in Australia was in 2007 in an overseas-born student who acquired the disease during a visit to a country with known ongoing polio transmission.

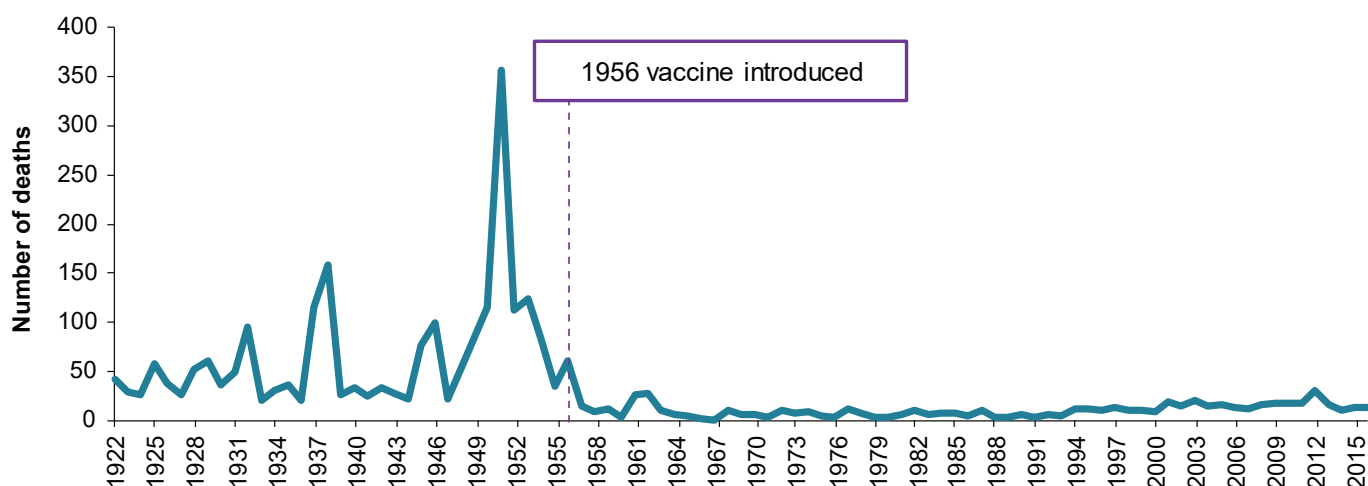


Sources: AIHW analysis of NNDSS data extracted on 03 August 2018; Hall R 1993. Notifiable diseases surveillance, 1917 to 1991. Communicable Diseases Intelligence 17:226-236.

Hospitalisations and deaths due to polio

Between 1994 and 2016, there were 111 hospital admissions for polio in Australia, either for acute infection or for the after-effects of a previous infection. Over three-quarters (78%) of these admissions were pre-2000.

In Australia the number of deaths caused by polio peaked in 1951, with 357 deaths. Since the widespread introduction of the polio vaccine in the 1950s, death caused by polio has been rare. The majority (89%) of polio deaths after 1996 were in people aged 65 and older and were likely due to the after-effects of a previous infection.



Sources: AIHW analysis of National Mortality database; AIHW 2010 GRIM books.

This fact sheet is part of the [Vaccine-preventable diseases](#) release. For more information see [Immunisation](#) on the AIHW website.

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