



UK Health
Security
Agency

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PRIORITISE POLIO VACCINATION IN YOUR PESACH PREPARATIONS

- **Poliovirus cases continue to be identified in Jewish communities in Israel and New York**
- **Polio disease can cause paralysis or death, but can be prevented by vaccination**
- **Get vaccinated at your GP surgery before you travel or visit relatives this Pesach**

Health organisations and Jewish community leaders are urging anyone celebrating Pesach to catch up with missed polio vaccinations before travelling or visiting relatives ahead of the festivities. Polio is a serious infection that can cause paralysis and death, and there is no cure. However, serious illness from polio can be prevented by being fully vaccinated.

Tragically, cases of paralytic polio have recently been reported in an unvaccinated adult in New York and an unvaccinated child in Israel. Anyone who has not been fully vaccinated or is only partially vaccinated are at the highest risk of becoming seriously unwell with polio. Communities with low levels of vaccine uptake as a whole are particularly vulnerable.

Dr Leonora Weil, a public health consultant, from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), said:

"I strongly encourage everyone celebrating Pesach to prioritise polio vaccination in your planning for the chaggim.

"Recently, there have been tragic cases of paralytic polio in Jewish communities in New York and Israel. Pesach is a time for celebration, getting together with loved ones and even a single case of paralysis from polio would be devastating as it is completely preventable.

"If you're not sure whether you or your child is vaccinated, check your child's red book or contact your GP. Get up to date with your polio vaccines before Pesach to protect yourself, your family and the community to ensure a Pesach kasher ve'sameach, and a Pesach in good health."

Dr Jonathan Cohen, Consultant and Head of Service, Pediatric Infectious Disease department at the Evelina London Children's Hospital said. *'Polio vaccines are very safe- and prevent this terrible disease. It would be a tragedy for a child to catch polio over Pesach because they were not vaccinated.'*

In a recent Q and A document launched for the Jewish community health leaders highlighted the importance of vaccinating children:

Professor David Katz, immunologist at UCL and Chair of the Jewish Medical Association said: *“Vaccines are the safest way to protect your child from diseases like diphtheria, polio, and measles. The short- and long-term effects of these diseases can be extremely serious and devastating.”*

Dr Blumberg, a GP at Stamford Hill practice said *“Yes, vaccines are safe. Billions of people have been safely vaccinated from key diseases around the world. All vaccines undergo extensive and rigorous multi-stage testing through clinical trials and are continually monitored for safety and effectiveness. In the UK the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulates medicines including vaccines to ensure the highest levels of safety.”*

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Further information:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/polio/>
- <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/02032023-02>
- https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2023/2023-03-10_immunized_against_polio.htm