DOCTOR SALK AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE POLIO VACCINE

In the early twentieth century, polio infected thousands of individuals each year in the United States, and spread fear around the world. This crippling disease and paralysis afflicted the young as well as the old. Many children were left with permanent disabilities, and some were unable to recover at all. The eradication of the disease was nearly every country around the world.

By 1954, Dr. Jonas Salk had a position at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Salk began his research in 1949 on a safe and effective polio vaccine. His research was funded by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. By 1953, Dr. Salk had successfully developed a vaccine, which he tested on himself and his family. By 1954, he tested it on thousands of people. The vaccine was declared safe and effective by the government.

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During the vaccine's testing, 1500 children were inoculated with the vaccine. The vaccine was found to be safe and effective. The vaccine was declared safe and effective by the government.

Government

Reports and Graphs on Polio
Background

“It’s a paradox of public health that being too clean can sometimes lead to disease.”

(PBS 1995 Report)

Polio has been around since Egyptian times, however, it has not always been prevalent. Polio first showed up in 1841 in Vermont with only 152 cases. After the 1964 outbreak, the number began to climb yearly.

“It begins with the first onset of symptoms, including fever, pain, and the earliest recognition that one’s limbs are no longer functioning properly. Then it turns to the initial hospitalization and the time when the formal diagnosis of polio is made.”

(Daniel J. Wilson)

“For every 200 people infected (mostly children), only one develops paralysis, which, more often than not, is only temporary; twenty have nonspecific symptoms; and the rest are asymptomatic.”

(Toole 2017 Report on Polio)

“By the 1930s, ’40s, ’50s, new mothers, especially those in the middle class, had no antibodies in their immune systems to pass to their children. When children were exposed to the poliovirus in later years, they were defenseless against the disease.”

(PBS 1995 Report)

Polio was never one of the deadliest diseases or why was it feared? Because it could cripple healthy children overnight. Every summer the country would go into Jackson, in fear of polio. Movie theaters, public libraries, and parks would shut down. Cities would be quarantined due to severe sickness.

Between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, polio disabled around 35,000 people each year in the United States alone, making it one of the most feared diseases of the 20th century.

(National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
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Polio was never one of the deadliest diseases; so why was it so feared? Because it could cripple healthy children overnight. Every summer the country would go into lockdown in fear of polio. Movie theaters, pools, libraries, and parks would shut down. Cities would be quarantined due to severe outbreaks.

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“Everyone was afraid of polio.”
(Joe Karten)

“There is no cure for polio. There are no miracle medicines to stop the damage to nerve cells or repair those already damaged.”
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In the early twentieth century, polio crippled thousands of individuals each year in the United States, and spread fear around the world. This tragedy ended when Dr. Jonas Salk successfully developed a safe and effective polio vaccine for the public, and lead to the immediate decline of polio cases. The triumph of the vaccine led to the eradication of the disease in nearly every country around the world.

In today's society, we don't have to worry about diseases such as smallpox, measles, or polio. This is because there are vaccines. However, there were not always vaccines readily available for the public.

"The modern era of epidemiology began in approximately 1946, when the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) was founded in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1946."

(centers for Disease Control)

"In 1947, Dr. Jonas Salk took a position at University of Pittsburgh, where he began conducting research on polio, then known as infantile paralysis."

(Pallansch)

During the polio's height, all focus was on finding a way to prevent it. There were many trial vaccines; they were rarely approved for testing.

After four years of trial and error, Salk and his team finally found a vaccine that gave triumphing results.

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“In America, incidence of the disease dropped from almost 58,000 reported cases in 1952 to just 1,000 cases 10 years later.”
(Randy Padhyay)

By 1979, thanks to Salk’s vaccine, the U.S. triumphantly eradicated the wild poliovirus.

(Randy Padhyay)

By 1994 polio was triumphantly eradicated from the western Hemisphere. Today, there are only three countries in the world that still have wild poliovirus.

During polio’s tragic height, parents suffered as they saw their children become paralyzed. Many families dealt with the shame of having a disabled child after the disease’s reign was over.

Will the world ever forget what happened during polio’s reign of terror? We might have; as more parents are not vaccinating their kids. Have they forgotten what a tragedy it was?

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In 1988, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Rotary International, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched the Global Polio Eradication Effort to rid the rest of the world of polio. (Bandyopadhyay)

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“Although quarantine and isolation, sanitation, education programs, and other factors help decrease the spread of disease, vaccines are likely the single most important factor responsible for the decline of killer epidemics in the United States and the rest of the world.” (Centers for Disease Control)

It was ‘pointless to try to decide whether the agony of a child who loses their mother is worse than the devastation of a mother who loses her child. The stories of those spouses who live with polio forcefully remind us that the illness also affected the lives of those who had the family and friends who came in contact with the disease.”

(Daniel J. Wilson)

Declaration

We, the members of the Global Polio Eradication initiative, hereby resolve that we will not accept the existence of polio in any part of the world.