

Can a Polio Outbreak in the USA Affect Your Workplace Health and Safety?

As health concerns continue to grow across the globe your workplace health and safety is affected. The recent identification of a polio outbreak is a shock to communities and the world and has now become another concern that employers need to factor into safety protocols.



Why the Polio Outbreak is a Concern

The recent polio outbreak within the US is a specific concern because it once caused widespread panic and can do so again. It's also concerning because polio was once eradicated (through vaccination), but has now come back. Also, evidence gathered during past polio outbreaks shows that for every paralytic polio case, hundreds of other individuals can potentially be exposed and infected.



Paralytic Polio Case in Rockland County, NY

A Rockland County, NY resident, was diagnosed with paralytic polio in June 2022. While previously healthy, this young adult had not been vaccinated for polio and became exposed to a particular strain, which then presented as patient leg paralysis.

Authorities drew samples of wastewater within Rockland County and samples from Orange County to analyze further. According to the CDC, the results from sequence analysis of the samples showed the presence of the poliovirus and could be genetically linked to the paralytic polio case in Rockland County.

Other individuals may potentially be infected as well, but at this time, it is unknown how many. What is known is that the polio virus is back again, with confirmed cases in the USA and a declared state of emergency in New York.

The recommendation is that all adults and children be up to date on immunizations.



Why Has Polio Re-emerged?

It is unclear exactly why polio has re-emerged. Its re-emergence in various parts of the world is often attributed to strife, wars, and vaccine access limitations. In today's increasingly mobile society, travel and immigration may also contribute to this re-emergence of the polio virus. Unvaccinated individuals and communities remain at higher risk for contracting the virus.

How Can It Affect Workplace Health and Safety?

As with other life-threatening viruses, including COVID-19, polio can negatively affect workplace health and safety.

The main thing employers need to know is that polio is highly contagious and can spread easily from individual to individual. It is spread by sneezing, coughing, or contamination with the feces of an infected individual.

An employee can transmit the polio virus even if they are asymptomatic. Also, since symptoms may take up to thirty days to show, the individual may be shedding the virus to others before realizing they have those symptoms. As a result, the workplace can become a hotbed of virus transmission.



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