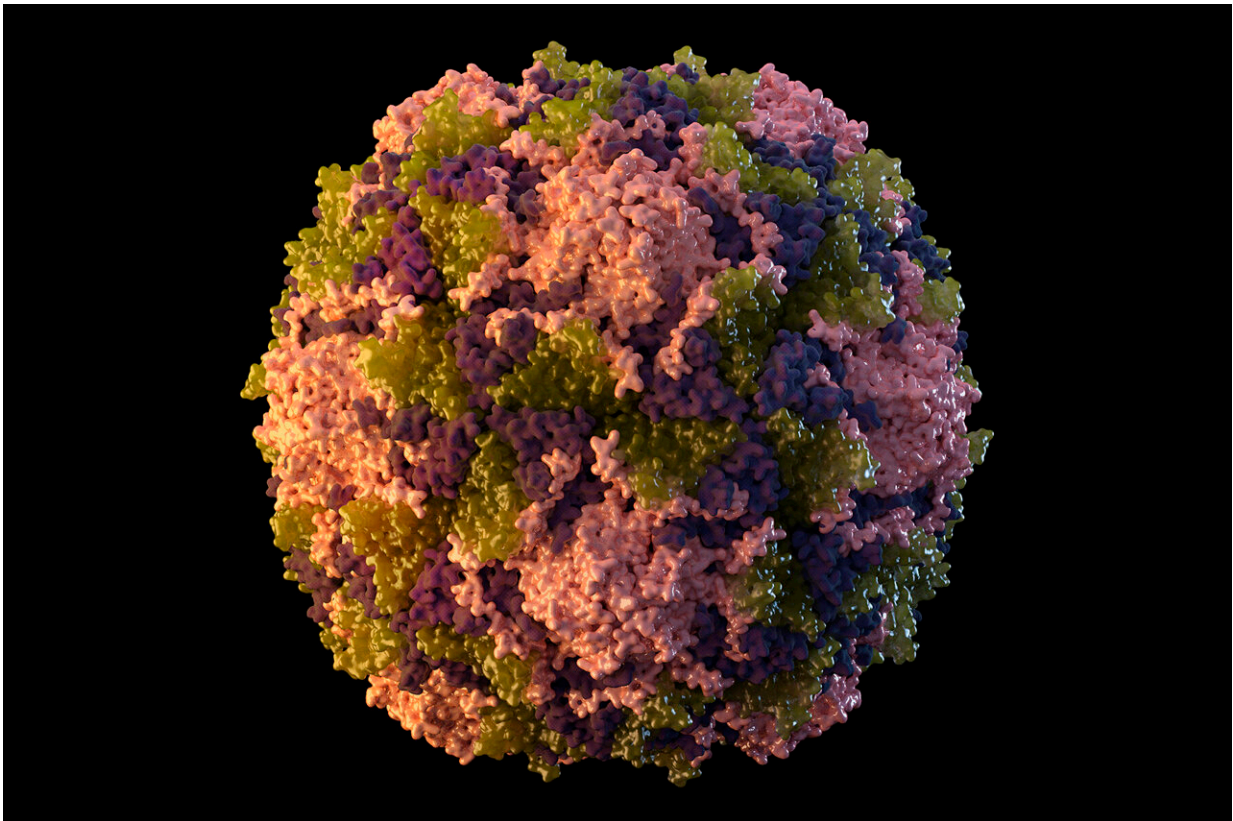


# Polio fears rise in New York amid possible community spread

August 5 2022

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This 2014 illustration made available by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention depicts a polio virus particle. On Thursday, July 21, 2022, New York health officials reported a polio case, the first in the U.S. in nearly a decade. Credit: Sarah Poser, Meredith Boyter Newlove/CDC via AP

New York state health officials issued a more urgent call Thursday for

unvaccinated children and adults to get inoculated against polio, citing new evidence of possible "community spread" of the dangerous virus.

The [polio virus](#) has now been found in seven different wastewater samples in two adjacent counties north of New York City, [health officials](#) said.

So far, only one person has tested positive for [polio](#)—an unvaccinated adult in Rockland County who suffered paralysis.

But based on earlier polio outbreaks, "New Yorkers should know that for every one case of paralytic polio observed, there may be hundreds of other people infected," the state's health commissioner, Dr. Mary T. Bassett, said in a statement.

"Coupled with the latest wastewater findings, the Department is treating the single case of polio as just the tip of the iceberg of much greater potential spread," she said. "As we learn more, what we do know is clear: the danger of polio is present in New York today. We must meet this moment by ensuring that adults, including pregnant people, and [young children](#) by 2 months of age are up to date with their immunization—the safe protection against this debilitating virus that every New Yorker needs."

The polio patient in Rockland County is the first person known to be infected with the virus in the U.S. [in nearly a decade](#). Wastewater samples collected in June and July in adjacent Orange County also contained the virus.



Parents and children wait outside the Riverside Public School in Elmira, N.Y., on July 1, 1953, to get the polio vaccine, due to the rise in infantile paralysis in Chemung and Steuben Counties. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the polio virus was detected in wastewater samples collected in June 2022 from Rockland County outside New York City. An unvaccinated adult recently contracted the life-threatening disease, but health officials said Tuesday, Aug. 2, 2022, they have not identified additional cases. Credit: AP Photo/Paul E. Thomson, File

Polio, once one of the nation's most feared diseases, was declared eliminated in the United States in 1979, more than two decades after vaccines became available.

A majority of people infected with polio have no symptoms, but can still

shed the virus and give it to others for days or weeks. A small percentage of people who get the disease suffer paralysis. The disease is fatal for between 5-10% of those paralyzed.

All school children in New York are required to have a polio vaccine, but enforcement of vaccination rules in some areas can be lax. Rockland and Orange counties are both known as centers of vaccine resistance. Statewide, about 79% of have completed their polio vaccination series by age two. In Orange County, that rate is 59%. In Rockland it is 60%.

The Orange County wastewater samples were initially collected from municipal wastewater treatment plants for COVID-19 testing.

"It is concerning that polio, a disease that has been largely eradicated through vaccination, is now circulating in our community, especially given the low rates of vaccination for this debilitating disease in certain areas of our County," said Orange County Health Commissioner Irina Gelman said. "I urge all unvaccinated Orange County residents to get vaccinated as soon as medically feasible."

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