POLIO MYELITIS (POLIO) ALERT
Information for hospital clinicians in NSW

Summary
- Globally, polio cases have doubled in the 2014 low season compared to 2013.
- The peak period for polio transmission is now commencing.
- There has been recent international spread of polio to previously polio-free countries.
- In response, WHO released a global polio alert on 5 May 2014.
- One probable case has already been detected in an Australian hospital in a traveller from the Horn of Africa.
- Cases of polio could present to NSW hospitals.

Who is at greatest risk of polio?
- Travellers to Pakistan, Cameroon, Syria, Afghanistan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Somalia and Nigeria are at greatest risk of polio.
- People who are not immune may become infected in countries where polio still exists. They may then bring the infection with them when they return/travel to Australia.
- Vaccination is crucial for reducing the polio risk in international travellers, particularly those to known infected areas.
- Health care workers caring for suspected polio cases should have completed a primary polio vaccination course and preferably had a booster in the past 10 years.

How does polio present?
- The majority of people infected with polio do not have symptoms.
- A quarter of infected persons experience a minor illness causing fever, headache, lethargy, nausea, flu-like symptoms, stiffness in the neck and back and pain in the limbs, which often resolves completely.
- Non-paralytic aseptic meningitis (symptoms of stiffness of the neck, back, and/or legs), usually following several days after a prodrome similar to that of minor illness, occurs in 1%–2% of polio infections. Increased or abnormal sensations can also occur.
- Less than 1% of people who are infected develop acute flaccid paralysis. This usually affects the limbs but it can also affect the muscles of the head and neck or the diaphragm muscle.

What should I do if I suspect polio?
- Isolate suspected cases in a single room with exclusive toilet and strict contact precautions.
- Test for polio virus Collect a stool specimen and a throat swab or nasopharyngeal aspirate, and consult with your local laboratory and infectious disease physician regarding testing. If lumbar puncture is performed, CSF should also be sent for testing.
- Notify your local public health unit immediately - don’t wait for test results before calling.

Further information:
- Contact your local public health unit on 1300 066 055

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