# Polio-Like Conditions on the Rise Across the U.S.

A rare condition reminiscent of polio that causes weakness and paralysis of the arms and legs is on the rise nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The condition is called acute flaccid myelitis (AFM), and it impacts the nervous system, also leaving some who contract it struggling with breathing difficulties. Like polio, AFM primarily affects children. There have been 362 cases on AFM since 2014 as of September 30, 2018. Scientists are unsure of the cause or a cure for the condition.

## What We Know

AFM is a relatively rare condition, occurring every one in a million people. Over the past four years, the majority of AFM cases are reported in August, September, and October. The timing of these spikes has led the CDC to link the condition to viral illnesses. An outbreak of Enterovirus d-68, a respiratory illness, in 2014 coincided with several cases of AFM and supported that theory, but instances of AFM have also happened after cases of West Nile virus or adenovirus.

The CDC reports that there are 38 confirmed cases of AFM spread across 16 different states this year. However, health officials from 26 different states are reporting a higher number of recent cases. Local offices say they have confirmed 52 cases. One reason for the discrepancy? An AFM diagnosis takes longer to confirm, often lasting more than a month and requiring a barrage of tests, including an examination of the spinal cord. Only then can a case of AFM be confirmed. The process also depends on the state the case occurs in. Some states don’t require healthcare providers to reports AFM cases, though we do know, at the time of this article’s

publication, that the latest outbreaks have occurred in Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Texas, Washington, and Pennsylvania.

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# The V Word

You can't write an article about a polio-adjacent illness without addressing polio and vaccination. Most scientists believe that polio was eradicated due to vaccines. Yet now almost all cases of polio reported are vaccine-derived. A 2017 study reported six cases of "wild" polio in comparison to 21 cases of vaccine-derived polio (Dr. Sherri Tenpenny says there were ten). Polio vaccines contain a live virus in a weakened state, but there is evidence that the virus is capable of returning to full strength. According to Raul Andino, one of the authors of the study and a professor of microbiology at the University of California at San Francisco,

> *We discovered there's only a few [mutations] that have to happen and they happen rather quickly in the first month or two post-vaccination…As the virus starts circulating in the community, it acquires further mutations that make it basically indistinguishable from the wild-type virus. It's polio in terms of virulence and in terms of how the virus spreads."*

In other words, the weakened poliovirus in polio vaccines mutates, allowing the virus to regain full strength. It's a familiar story. Microbes evolve in response to their environment. It's their nature, and those evolutions are part of many of the most urgent health issues facing the world, like antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

https://youtu.be/T1CULm76N5Q?t=369

> *When we eliminate these viruses through vaccines, nature abhors a vacuum. And so when viruses are eliminated or bacteria for that matter, like when Prevnar takes out thirteen strains of strep, of which there are more than 80, the more virulant strains come to the surface.” – Dr. Sherri Tenpenny*

Be sure to check out the video above. Dr. Sherri Tenpenny believes the vaccine industry is “priming the pump” for a new vaccine.

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## How Can We Know

There is no way to say for sure that the increasing outbreaks of AFM are a mutation of the poliovirus or if a savvy microbe saw an opportunity and took it. There are holes in polio research; we are lacking basic information to determine things like how it’s caused. Of those infected with polio, nearly three-fourths of them will not present with any symptoms. A quarter of those infected will appear to have the flu and recover with no other symptoms within 2 to 5 days. And there is an opportunity for a weakened live virus (like the vaccine) to return to full strength and perhaps mutate into something more upsetting.

**Sources:**


- *Rare, polio-like paralyzing disorder affecting children on the rise, CDC says* – USA Today
- *AFM Investigation* – CDC
- *12 More Possible Cases Of A Polio-Like Illness Have Been Seen In Children In Pennsylvania And Illinois* – Buzzfeed
- *Polio-like illness is on the rise with 87 possible cases* – NBC News