

WORLD/NATIONAL NEWS

Health officials urge travelers to get polio vaccine before visiting Israel

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People should take a dose of the polio vaccine before they go to Israel, urges the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

A CDC advisory recommending the vaccine will soon be sent to health departments, private physicians and travel agents, Jim Mize, a public health adviser at the CDC, said last Friday.

"We strongly advise a traveler getting the vaccine at this time," Mize said. "As of this morning, Israel has 16 cases diagnosed."

As a result of the CDC recommendation, the Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia has recommended that mission participants get boosters before they travel.

Federation received a reminder of the CDC position from the United Jewish Appeal in New York. Gerald S. Nagel, UJA's director of public relations, said, "We strongly support travel to Israel. Our policy in this matter was to adhere to the advice of the CDC in Atlanta, and we passed along their advice to federations throughout the United States."

The CDC's Mize said, "Most people in the United States received polio shots or oral vaccine on sugar cubes as children, but now, if they're going to be in one of the countries with polio, which includes Israel, they should receive a single polio booster."

Eleven of the cases in Israel have been diagnosed in Hadera, 38 miles northeast of Tel Aviv, he said. The polio virus has been found in sewage in the areas of Akko, Rehovot, Hadera and Lod-Ramla, according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

In a discrepancy with the CDC's figures, the JTA reported 10 confirmed cases and "three or four suspected cases."

In Jerusalem, the Health Ministry announced that Israel's entire population will be reinoculated against polio by the end of October. The immunization campaign began Sunday with the vaccination of newborn babies and toddlers at 1,000 health clinics.

"There is no reason at all for panic," said Health Minister Shoshana Arbeli-Almoslino. "This is a precautionary measure."

The Health Ministry said it was acting on recommendations of three international polio experts: Professor Joseph Melnick of Houston, Professor Walter Orlstein of the CDC and Dr. Michael Rey of the World Health Organization, a U.N. agency.

The Salk vaccine, containing dead virus, is administered by injection. The Sabin vaccine, which consists of live but weakened virus, is taken orally.

Until now, the Health Ministry had confined its vaccination campaign to the Hadera and Lod-Ramla regions.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Mize said that his agency has recommended since 1982 that travelers be inoculated if they were going to any country that has cases of polio, which includes all nations except Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Eastern and Western Europe, and Japan.

The CDC is sending out the advisory, Mize said, because of a lack of general knowledge about the need for polio vaccination for travelers.

"We think attention ought to be called to what we've been recommending for several years," he said. "The risk of going to Israel is no greater than that in developing countries in Africa or South America."

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency contributed to this report.