

Polio Vaccination Poster Ministry of Health, 1958

This poster is from the Ministry of Health's 1958-59 Polio vaccination campaign. Poliomyelitis (abbreviated to polio) is a serious viral infection that is spread by contamination of food and water by faeces and saliva from infected people.

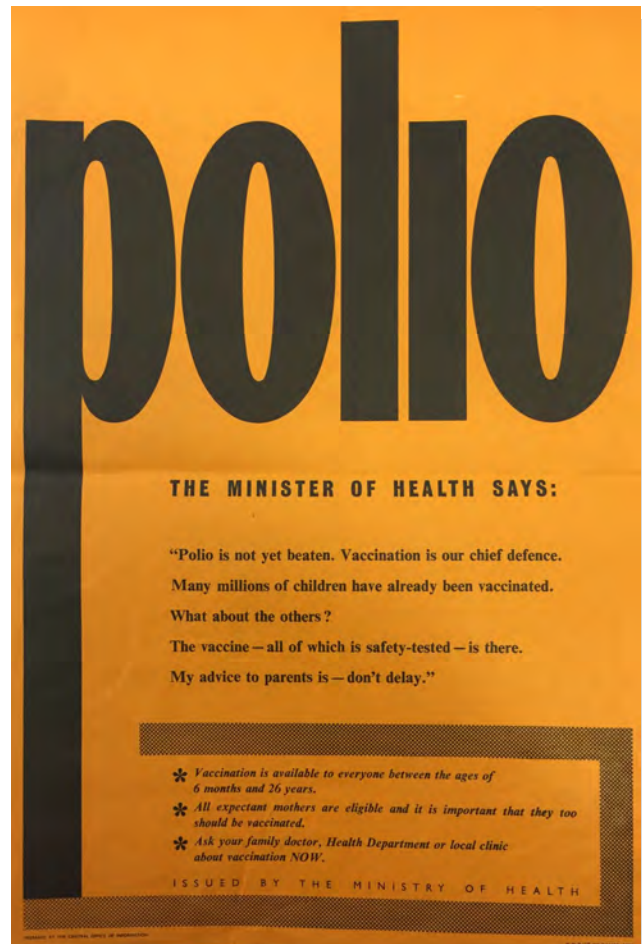
Many people with polio show no symptoms but are still infectious. In some the disease produces flu-like symptoms but it may also cause muscular paralysis which can be fatal.

During the 1800s improvements in sanitation in Britain reduced deaths from other water-borne diseases such as typhoid, but polio remained a problem. Epidemics continued into the 1900s, with a major outbreak of nearly 8,000 cases in 1947 resulting in 750 deaths.

This was because when conditions were unsanitary, babies were usually exposed to the virus quickly but were protected by maternal immunity (antibodies from their mother). As sanitation improved, children were less likely to be exposed to the virus, so they were older when they caught polio and no longer protected by maternal antibodies. Paradoxically, improvements in sanitation contributed to an increase in deaths.

A polio vaccine was invented in the United States by Joseph Salk and introduced in 1956. This poster was the first of a series produced by the Ministry of Health from 1958 to 1960 promoting a national vaccination campaign. It includes a message to parents from the Minister of Health but no images. There was such a sense of urgency that the government did not want to delay printing by commissioning artwork. Later posters in the campaign included images of children.

The campaign was successful. Cases fell to very low numbers by the mid-1960s. The last case of naturally-occurring polio in the UK was in 1984.



John Johnson Collection, Public Services Box 5, 1 w.

Questions

1. The Ministry of Health launched a national advertising campaign encouraging people to vaccinate using local NHS services. What were the advantages of this approach?
2. In what ways was this campaign different from smallpox vaccination in the previous century?
3. The government encouraged parents to see vaccination of their children as a duty. What language in the poster appeals to a sense of national duty?

FURTHER READING

Read more about polio vaccination at the Vaccine Knowledge Project:
<https://vk.ovg.ox.ac.uk/vk/polio>

TRANSCRIPTION: Polio Vaccination Poster Ministry of Health, 1958

Polio

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH SAYS:

"Polio is not yet beaten. Vaccination is our chief defence.

Many millions of children have already been vaccinated.

What about the others?

The vaccine - all of which is safety-tested - is there.

My advice to parents is - don't delay."

* Vaccination is available to everyone between the ages of 6 months and 26 years.

* All expectant mothers are eligible and it is important that they too should be vaccinated.

* Ask your family doctor, Health Department or local clinic about vaccination NOW.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH