

Cuban population protected against polio

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Cuba is the only country in the world that since 1961 has been holding annual polio vaccination campaigns, which have allowed under 72-year-old population to be protected against the disease, experts from the ministry of public health (MINSAP by its Spanish acronym) said in Havana.

Eliminating immunopreventable diseases requires vaccination coverage of more than 95 percent, aggressive measures to control outbreaks, and a strong surveillance system. Cuba maintains these three factors as a guarantee of success for one of the health system's priorities, which in 1962 made it the first Latin American country to declare itself polio-free.

Cuba provides two types of polio vaccine: the inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), which is administered intradermally, and the live, attenuated oral polio vaccine (OPV), which protects the population from the three types of poliovirus, Dr. Belkys Galindo, epidemiologist at Pedro Kouri Institute (IPK) and head of surveillance for adverse events in polio vaccination, explained.

The first is given to four- and eight-month-old children, and the second, through immunization campaigns two times a year, she stressed.

According to statistics, 856,700.000 doses have been given from 1961 to 2019 to protect the population from a virus that attacks the spinal cord and causes muscular atrophy and paralysis. For her part, Dr. Sonia Resik, head of the Virology Department at the same institute and the National Poliomyelitis Reference Laboratory, stressed that Cuba is safe because it

maintains 99.5 percent coverage in the OPV and 100 percent in the IPV.

According to the World Health Organization, if there are enough people in a community who are immunized, the virus will not find sensitive hosts and will die out.

For that reason, in order to stop transmission and prevent epidemic outbreaks, it is necessary to maintain high vaccination coverage, as Cuba has done for several decades, Resik noted. (ACN)

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