

Polio in Australia

Polio was made a notifiable disease in all States and Territories of Australia in 1922. Major polio epidemics occurred during the late 1930s, early 1940s and the 1950s. It is estimated that a minimum of 20,000–40,000 individuals developed paralytic polio in Australia between 1930 and 1988, but the actual number of people infected by the virus is unknown.

Polio has now almost certainly been eradicated from Australia. The most recent case of polio, caused by wild poliovirus, was in 1978.³³ Data from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (1999) showed that 81 percent of one year old children in Australia had received the recommended three doses of OPV in their first year of life.³⁴

In Queensland

The annual rate of notifications in Queensland since 1917 is shown in Figure 2. The largest epidemic of polio in Queensland’s history was in 1951–1952.

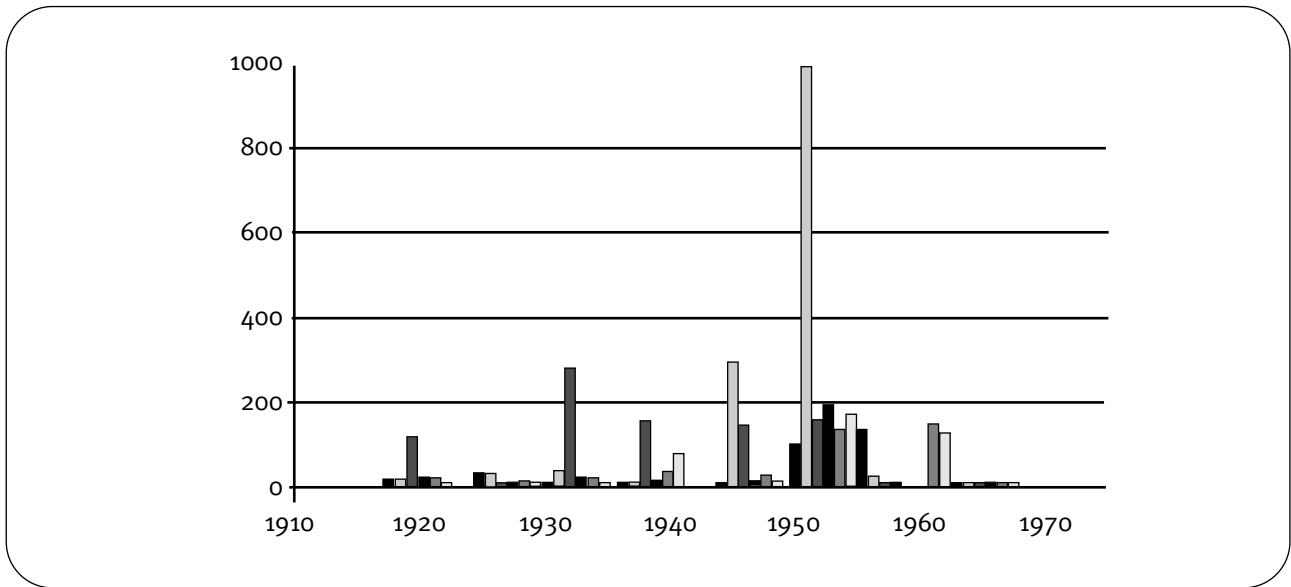


Figure 2: Annual Rate of Notifications of Acute Polio in Queensland³⁵
(Collated from the Annual Reports of Health and Medical Services Queensland 1917-1975)

In 1956, mass immunisation with the Salk vaccine commenced. For four years, very few cases of polio occurred. Then, in 1961-62, another epidemic occurred. Several cases were identified in vaccinated persons. It was found that the organism causing infection was a Type III poliovirus and that the potency of the Type III component in the vaccine being used was inadequate. After this deficiency was remedied, polio virtually disappeared from Queensland. In 1967, the oral Sabin vaccine was substituted for the injected Salk vaccine and was equally successful.³⁶ The last case of polio in Queensland was notified in 1975.³⁷