State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES
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CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

POONAM ALAIGH, MD, MSHCPM, FACP
Commissioner

Dear Colleague:

It has been over 50 years since the development of the Salk polio vaccine. After the introduction of this vaccine, and soon afterward the Sabin oral vaccine, countless children and young adults were spared the ravages of poliomyelitis, or polio. Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) is a neurological disorder that affects up to 60 percent of the estimated 650,000 individuals who recovered from paralytic polio 40 or more years ago. It is believed by many researchers to be caused by the gradual loss of nerve cells damaged by the polio virus after decades of overuse. In New Jersey, there are an estimated 30,000 polio survivors.

By the mid-1980's, many polio survivors began to experience symptoms such as new weakness and pain in muscles, problems with sleeping, swallowing and breathing, severe fatigue, and a decline in the ability to carry out activities of daily living such as walking and bathing. These symptoms usually develop 15 years or more after the original illness and have now been recognized as PPS.

As a health care professional, you may see polio survivors in your practice describing a variety of neurological, orthopedic, musculoskeletal, emotional, medical, and/or rehabilitative complaints but do not make the connection with their earlier disease. These patients may need to be referred to neurologists or other specialists, preferably having experience with post-polio patients. After a diagnosis of PPS, treatment can often lessen or eliminate some of the symptoms. In New Jersey, legislation was enacted to ensure that information about PPS would be made available to the general public. Two helpful web sites out of many can be found at the Polio Network of New Jersey http://www.njpolio.org/ and Post-Polio Health International http://www.post-polio.org/ .

Notwithstanding, it is critical to maintain high levels of immunization coverage throughout the population in order to provide maximum protection to the community at large. In particular, we must remain diligent and immunize children. Most people infected with the polio virus have no symptoms, but some infections cause paralysis and even death. Vaccination will assure that herd immunity will provide protection from the disease when a case is introduced in the country from areas of the world where polio still exists. If you have any questions, please call the Vaccine Preventable Disease Program in the Department of Health and Senior Services at 609-826-4861.

Sincerely,

Poonam Alaigh

Poonam Alaigh, MD, MSHCPM, FACP
Commissioner