

Polio Australia

Representing polio survivors throughout Australia

The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: Polio vaccine recommendations regarding travel to Papua New Guinea for Australian travellers

With the recent confirmed death from Polio virus, and confirmed cases of Paralytic Polio in children near Lae, Papua New Guinea, we are writing to express concern and seek confirmation of policies and practices Australia is proposing and performing to ensure this country remains Polio free.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers the risk of international spread of poliovirus from Papua New Guinea is low because there are no shared borders. While the risks are considered low for the international spread of the Polio virus, the consequences are potentially extreme, along with significant long-term costs to an individual and the community.

We are concerned because of the regular sea and air travel between residents/citizens from Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the relationships between Australia/Queensland and health support services, and with Australian businesses that exist in Papua New Guinea.

We are asking whether adequate surveillance exists at border sites in Australia, including surveillance of young children from Papua New Guinea and particularly from the eastern highlands, for signs of Polio and to ensure the polio vaccination has been administered. We believe an increased focus is warranted while the WHO and the Papua New Guinea Department of Health continue with their scheduled vaccination rounds during 2018.

We are also seeking confirmation of any publicly focused strategies and communication between the Papua New Guinea Department of Health and the Australia Department of Health. We note the advice from the WHO that anyone from the affected areas who travel, should receive an additional dose of inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) or bivalent oral poliovirus (bOPV), and be provided with a written record of such vaccination or use the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis.

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We would also like to confirm Australia's recommendations regarding travel to Papua New Guinea for Australian travellers, businesses and government agencies, especially involving any contact with the eastern highlands and Lae, Papua New Guinea.

We urge the current advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to "ensure you're vaccinated" is actively communicated, adding to this advice the heightened relevance for those working in, or in contact with, the eastern highland provinces of Papua New Guinea.

We do not believe in sensationalising these risks but do value the fortunate situation Australians enjoy of not having any further cases of polio, and trust that we continue to ensure this remains the case.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Gillian Thomas
President
Polio Australia



Professor Robert Booy
Head of Clinical Research
National Centre for Immunisation
Research and Surveillance