

The Differences in the Responses to Poliovirus



In the early 1950s, Polio was one of the most feared diseases. Before 1955, when the poliovirus vaccine was introduced, polio outbreaks gave rise to more than 15,000 cases of paralysis each year.

Throughout the 1940s, the cases of poliovirus in the United States grew at an exponential rate. The virus seemed to strengthen in the summers when there was a warm, humid environment.

To combat the spread of polio, public health officials urged people to quarantine themselves in towns where the number of polio cases were on the rise. When kids were thought to have the disease, they were taken by officials and were put in sanitariums to isolate. Health workers would physically remove children from their homes, playgrounds, and stores if they were suspected to have the virus.

The collective effort of developing a poliovirus vaccine was led by President Franklin Roosevelt, Dr. Jonas Salk, and all of the men and women that relentlessly worked in the Salk Lab. Many people also risked their health by offering to be the first to be experimentally inoculated. To directly respond to the outbreak, President Franklin Roosevelt founded the National Institute of Infant Paralysis, which became known as the March of Dimes to the public. The reason behind organizing this foundation was to encourage Americans to send dimes to the White House which would be put towards finding a cure for polio and treating patients with polio.



In 1947, Dr. Jonas Salk began researching the poliovirus, and while trying to find a cure for the disease he went against all medical orthodoxy and scientists' opinions. Salk pursued a killed virus vaccine while many scientists believed that a live virus vaccine would cure the disease. Salk began testing his vaccine on children in his local area, Pittsburg PA. The results showed that the vaccine worked, but it still needed to be tested on more people. In 1954, the March of Dimes organized the largest medical study in history to test the poliovirus killed vaccine. 1.8 million schoolchildren were inoculated with the vaccine, and in April of 1955, the vaccine that Jonas Salk manufactured was deemed as "safe and effective."

