

# MARK'S POLIO SHOT

Mark Taylor stood thoughtfully in line inside the school gymnasium. He could smell rubbing alcohol. He could hear kids crying. He was waiting to get a shot. He was a little nervous. But he was also grateful. His mother was beaming as she got him and his younger sister ready for school. No more worrying about 10 year old Mark and 7 year old Grace.

Mark was going to be vaccinated against a dreadful virus called polio. Polio had caused so much fear and panic. Parents were frightened as each summer approached. Polio was at its worst in summer. And now it would finally be defeated.

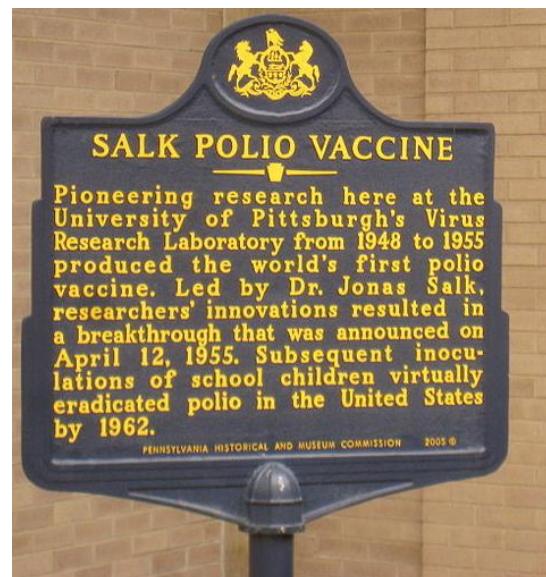
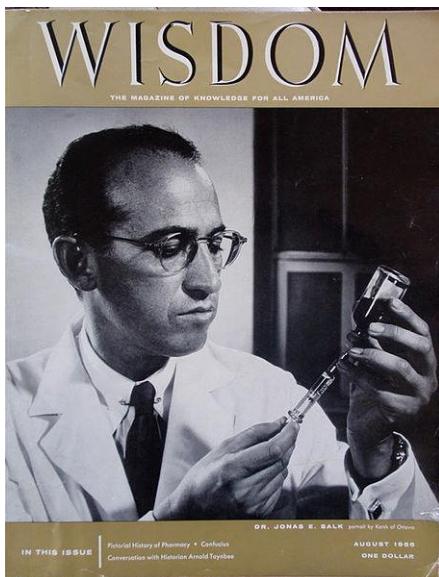


Thousands of kids suffered from polio every year. Many kids were paralyzed. Some needed crutches and leg braces. Some needed wheelchairs. Some were paralyzed from the neck down. Some even died.

Mark now knew that none of these things would happen to him. Thanks to **Dr. Jonas Salk** and other researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, there was now a vaccine available. The **National**



**Foundation for Infantile Paralysis** had collected donations for years to fund research to find a cure for polio. Infantile Paralysis is another name for polio. In 1955, it was announced that trials of the polio vaccine were successful. Trials are tests done to ensure that a vaccine is safe. Now the vaccine would be available to everyone.

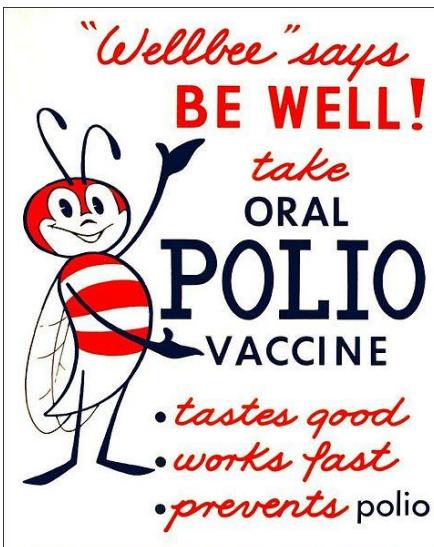


Mark knew all about how vaccines work. When a virus enters the body, antibodies are created to fight it off. Antibodies are like tiny soldiers. Unfortunately, when an unfamiliar virus gets into the body it takes time for enough antibodies to be created. The virus can cause a lot of problems and take over the body before enough soldiers are ready for the fight.

The polio vaccine contains a small amount of dead polio virus. Because the virus is dead it **can't do any** harm. But when the body detects the virus, it creates the antibodies needed to prepare for an invasion. If



the real virus does get into the body, there are plenty of antibodies ready to destroy it. This is called **immunity**.



out in a stretcher and put into an ambulance. John spent several weeks in the hospital. Now he uses crutches and walks with a limp.

Mark was so happy to receive his vaccination. He was so happy to have immunity against polio. But it was also a bittersweet moment. He felt sad for John. If only the vaccine had been available one year earlier. At least there would be far fewer kids like John in the future. Mark went back to class.

As his arm was prepared for the vaccine, Mark thought of his best friend John. John lived three houses down from him. Mark still remembers the awful night last summer when he was awakened by sirens. He remembers looking out his bedroom window and seeing the ambulance pull up in front of John's house. He ran outside with his parents. He watched as John was taken



#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STORY**

Why do you think Mark was so thoughtful at the beginning of the story?

Why was Mark's mother so happy as she got Mark and Grace ready for school?

What happened to some kids who got polio?

Why did Mark feel both happy and sad as he walked back to class?

How do you think John may have felt knowing that his schoolmates were receiving the vaccine?

How do you think a vaccine trial might work to make sure a vaccine is safe?

Can you explain what immunity is in your own words?

How do you think parents felt about Dr. Jonas Salk and his polio vaccine?

How do you think you would have felt during a polio outbreak?

How would you design a poster to encourage people to get vaccinated against polio?

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