

**A Concise History of Polio
in the United States**
 John White – March 5, 2025

A Concise History of Polio in the United States

Poliomyelitis (polio):

1. is a paralyzing and potentially fatal disease
2. is a virus spread from person to person due to poor hygiene and bad sanitation
3. has been around since ancient times
4. affects mostly kids under five
5. is not curable but is preventable with vaccines


1894 – First documented outbreak in US (Vermont)
 1916 – Major outbreak in NYC kills 2,000




The Iron Lung was invented in 1929

President Franklin Roosevelt, a victim of polio in 1921 at age 39, created the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis in 1937.

Donations poured in after entertainer Eddie Cantor promoted the "March of Dimes" catchphrase in 1938.




The epidemic peaked in 1952; 58,000 cases with 3,000 deaths



Dr. Jonas Salk
(1914-1995)

Other key players: Basil O'Connor (March of Dimes) and Thomas Francis (U-M School of Public Health)

A few of the 1.8 million "Polio Pioneers" - 1954

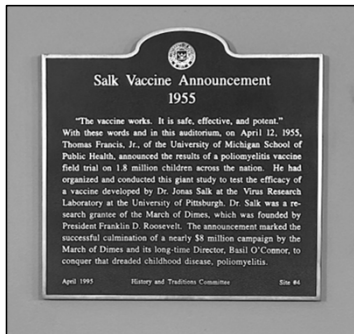


April 12, 1955 - Thomas Francis announces to the world:
 "The vaccine works. It is safe, effective, and potent."



Jonas Salk, Thomas Francis, and Basil O'Connor

Front Page of "The Michigan Daily" – April 12, 1955



This plaque is in the lobby of the Rackham Auditorium, site of the "safe, effective and potent" announcement on April 12, 1955.

The date of the event was exactly ten years after FDR's passing.

With widespread vaccination and the advent of the Sabin vaccine in 1960, the US was polio-free by 1979 but...



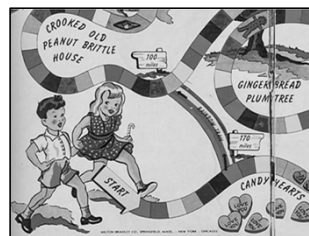
... polio is just a plane ride away. Learn more on endpolionow.org.



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Bonus slide – Did you know?....



In the earliest artwork, the boy was wearing a brace on one of his legs.

"Candy Land," the board game, was created in 1948 by schoolteacher Eleanor Abbott as she was recovering from polio. It was tested on kids in the same wards. Milton Bradley published the game in 1949. Over 50 million copies have been sold.