

The Reward for
Work Well Done:
Jonas Salk

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Introduction: Polio

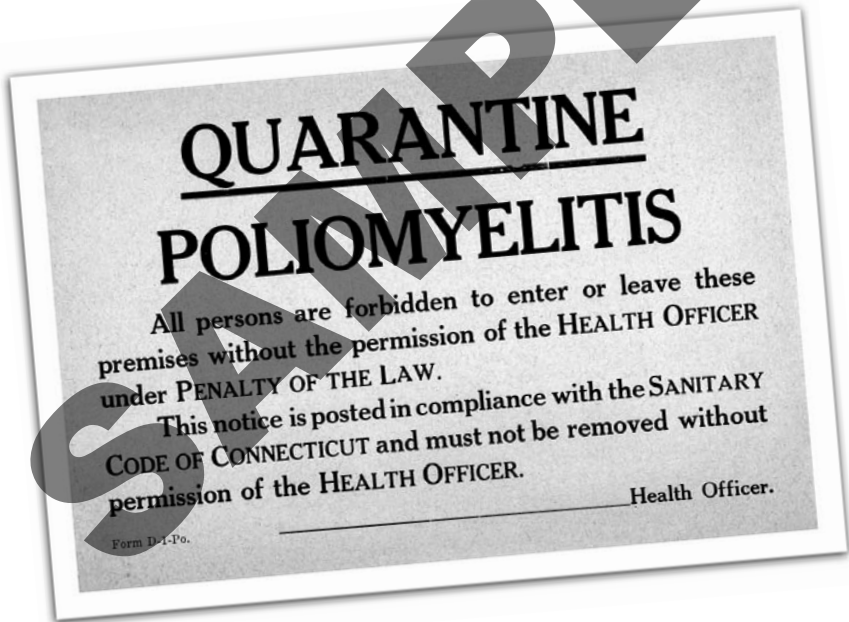
Polio was often called "infantile paralysis," because it mainly attacked children.



The first polio epidemic swept across the United States in the summer of 1916. In twenty-six states, more than 27,000 people were ill, and 6,000 people died. Sadly, most of the victims were children under five years old.

Doctors around the world struggled to treat polio. Unfortunately, no one knew what caused polio or how to prevent it.

By the 1930s, to most Americans, summer meant polio season. Cities all over the country closed swimming pools, movie theaters, and playgrounds. Parents kept their children away from crowds and public places. It was impossible to guess when or where polio would strike next.



Homes and entire neighborhoods were quarantined to try to control the disease.

A Good Beginning

Jonas Salk was born in New York City on October 28, 1914, less than two years before the first polio epidemic. He was a serious, well-behaved boy who got good grades in school. In fact, he was such a serious student, he raced ahead in school and entered City College of New York when he was only fifteen years old.

There, Jonas loved to study science, especially biology and chemistry. He liked the way scientists asked their own questions and then worked to find the answers. Jonas decided to become a doctor so that someday he could answer questions about what caused diseases.