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# Alexandra Hills man Geoff Ballantyne, 70, says polio epidemic shows vaccines capable of beating a virus

Jordan Crick - Local News

AN ALEXANDRA Hills man says the effectiveness of vaccines in managing Australia's polio epidemic should motivate those hesitant to get the COVID jab.



GET THE JAB: Alexandra Hills man Geoff Ballantyne says vaccines stopped polio in its tracks. Photo: supplied

Geoff Ballantyne, who was struck down with polio as a child and forced into a long hospital stint, said no-one questioned vaccination during the 1950s epidemic.

It helped rid Australia of the virus, [which is estimated to have killed more than 1000 people nationally](#) between 1944 and 1954.

- Also read: [Rotary centenary at Redland Museum with clubs of Quandamooka Country exhibition](#)
- Also read: [Capalaba Rotary Club celebrates 40 years of giving in 2019](#)
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"All the anti-vaxxers of today puzzle me, because you can only be an anti-vaxxer as long as you don't get a disease," Mr Ballantyne said. "As soon as you get something you change your mind."

"I don't even remember anyone asking permission (for the vaccine) or anything, I just remember everyone at school lining up and we all took our medicine.

"Nobody was going to question it, and that's why we don't have polio in Australia today."



SICK: Geoff Ballantyne was left paralysed on the left side of his body after contracting the virus as a child. Photo: supplied

[COVID vaccine uptake in Redlands has been strong recently](#), with more than 50 per cent of the population now fully vaccinated.

It comes amid repeated calls from the state government for people to get the jab, warning a Delta outbreak was inevitable in Queensland.

Mr Ballantyne contracted polio in 1953 as a three-year-old, leaving his left side paralysed. He was isolated in hospital for about six weeks to prevent spread in the community.

"The only thing that I had done the day before I had polio, before I was paralysed, was play with a goat," he said.

"The left side of my body was paralysed. After I came out of hospital my left arm didn't work at all, and sometimes it still doesn't."

[Australia and the entire western pacific was declared polio-free](#) in 2000 before a 22-year-old Melbourne student fell ill in 2007 after a visit to Pakistan. It was the nation's first case since 1986.

Polio Awareness Month is held each year in October to highlight strategies that helped reduce the spread and raise the profile of Australia's polio-affected community.

Mr Ballantyne, who continues to experience fatigue because of the virus, said the arguments against COVID vaccination were mind-boggling.

"If they just got it, it would all be over and done with," he said. "My message is simply we did it with polio and we cured the problem, now let's do it with COVID.

"Polio isn't the only thing we've beaten by vaccines, but the problem is today's people don't know about polio.

"In the 50s, you just did what was right for the community, you didn't turn around and say 'is this good for me personally?'

"Today it is all about me, back then it was about the community. I don't remember any questions."

Australia's double-dosed population stands at 59.3 per cent for over 16s, with New South Wales leading the way at 70.3 per cent.

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<https://www.redlandcitybulletin.com.au/story/7460632/polio-sufferer-says-history-shows-vaccines-the-way-out-of-virus-mire>