

Advocates say polio threat can't be ignored

By Ellen Sussman

Special to the Green Valley News

Cece Axton was 2 years old when she was diagnosed with polio.

She spent three years in two hospitals, time in an iron lung, and had six corrective surgeries on her feet and hip.

At 30, she showed symptoms of Post Polio Syndrome and has had three back surgeries to correct a bulging disc. Today, the 67-year-old Sahuarita resident has paralysis in her left arm and needs assistance to walk.

"Post Polio Syndrome is very frustrating because a survivor works very hard to recover from the effects of polio and then PPS once again robs you of an active life," she said.

Micki Minner, 57, of Tucson was 18 months when she contracted wild-



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POLIO VACCINE ADVOCATES Cece Axton (left) and Micki Minner.

type virus, a strain of polio, while living on Guam. She still remembers the pain, and she remembers the trauma of being alone in a room in an iron lung.

Drawing on their experiences, the women are now advocates urging parents to get their children vaccinated against polio. Minner

is president of Polio Epic, a support group in Tucson; Axton is on the board.

The group started in 1985, and has about 250 members. They do presentations, including one for a group of doctors tied to the University of Arizona, and obtained a grant to educate the public on Post Polio Syndrome.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Cece Axton and Micki Minner will have a table at the Health Fair at the West Center from 8 a.m. to noon March 16.
- Polio Epic Inc., which represents Arizona polio survivors, presents two speakers at 2 p.m. April 11 at Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2450 E. Fort Lowell Road in Tucson. Edmee Botwright will speak on the importance of vaccines; Mia Hansen will speak about unvaccinated people in other countries.
- Axton and Minner have a web site (polioepic.org) and are available to speak to groups. Contact Axton at 520-495-5122 or axton@cox.com, and Minner at 520-743-1556 or mickiminner@msn.com.

It's still around

It has been 60 years since Dr. Jonas Salk's polio vaccine was approved, and 53 years since Dr. Albert Sabin's oral Sabin polio vaccine began to eradicate the disease.

But while polio isn't a problem in the United States, it's not completely gone. In 2012, an unvaccinated man in California was diagnosed with polio after drinking untreated water.

Polio has also been recently recorded in the Middle East and Africa, and U.S. public health officials fear the virus is just a plane ride away. In January, the Polio Global Eradication Initiative

News said Pakistan was home to 85 percent of the world's polio cases in 2014.

Axton and Minner want the public to know that polio still exists, and that parents need to be vigilant to vaccinate their children. They are concerned that many parents are opting against some vaccines because of erroneous information that it may cause autism.

"Most of today's young parents weren't around when the polio epidemic hit in the early 1950s. They don't know the horrors of the disease," Minner said. "They haven't seen children in iron lungs, on crutches or with braces on their legs. If today's parent don't vaccinate their chil-

dren the next epidemic is a matter of when, not if."

The anti-vaccine movement was fueled in recent years by Playboy model-turned-activist Jenny McCarthy, who believed her son's autism was caused by the MMR vaccine. Though largely shouted down by the medical community, McCarthy drew attention and followers, and parents questioned whether vaccines could do more harm than good.

Dr. William Schaffner, chair of Preventive Medicine at Vanderbilt University, told ABC News last year that "more and more parents today are delaying vaccines or skipping them altogether, leaving their children vulnerable to deadly diseases."

"If there's a lesson for us here in the United States it's that we have to keep vaccinating absolutely every child," he said. "If polio is reintroduced into this country, it will find those children whose parents are stretching out their immunization schedules, leaving them susceptible for longer periods of time. That would be a tragedy."

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