

Eastern Equine Encephalitis Fact Sheet



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What is Eastern equine encephalitis?

Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) is a rare but serious disease that is caused by a virus that can cause inflammation of the brain. It can infect humans, horses, birds, and other animals.

How is the EEE virus spread?

The EEE virus is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. The disease is not directly passed from person-to-person or from horse-to-horse.

What are the symptoms of EEE?

People with mild cases of EEE experience fever, chills, body and muscle pain, and general weakness. Severe cases of EEE infection begin with sudden onset of high fever (103° to 106°F), headache, stiff neck, chills and vomiting. The illness may then progress to altered mental status, seizures, and inflammation of the brain. The disease quickly worsens and can lead to coma and death. Around one third of the patients who get EEE die, and many of those who survive have mild to severe brain damage.

Who is at risk for infection with the EEE virus?

Anyone who lives in or visits an area where EEE virus is circulating is at risk for infection. Persons over the age of 50 and under the age of 15 are at greatest risk for severe illness following infection.

How soon do people infected with EEE get sick?

Symptoms of EEE usually begin 4 to 10 days after a bite from an infected mosquito.

How is EEE diagnosed?

EEE can only be diagnosed by a health-care provider. If you think that you or a family member have signs of illness compatible with EEE you should speak with your provider as soon as possible. If your provider thinks you have EEE, he or she will take samples of blood and cerebral spinal fluid to be tested for EEE.

What is the treatment for EEE?

There is no specific treatment for EEE. Severe illnesses are treated by supportive therapy which may include hospitalization, respiratory support, and intravenous fluids. These treatments help to relieve the symptoms of EEE infection.

Is there a vaccine for EEE?

Currently there is no human vaccine approved for EEE. There is an effective vaccine for horses that can be obtained by contacting a licensed veterinarian.

What can I do to protect myself from EEE infection?

The best way to prevent EEE is to avoid being bitten by the mosquitoes that transmit the disease.

- Use an EPA approved repellent when outdoors. Always follow the instructions on the label
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, and socks when outdoors
- Use screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your house
- Get rid of places where mosquitoes can lay their eggs by draining standing water around your house
- Take extra care to avoid mosquito bites in hardwood swamps and woodland habitats where there is greater potential for exposure to infected mosquitoes

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.