Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease
Fact Sheet

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
An Office of the Department of Health and Human Services
Paul R. LePage, Governor Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

What is Creutzfeldt - Jakob disease (CJD)?
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) is a rare, worsening, fatal brain disorder. CJD is caused by a type of protein called a prion. Prion proteins occur in both a normal form, which is a harmless protein found in the body's cells, and in an infectious form, which causes disease. Prion diseases can be found in humans and in animals.
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Are there different kinds of CJD?
Yes, CJD exists in four forms:

- Sporadic CJD (sCJD): also called spontaneous, for which the cause is not known. This is the most common type of CJD and accounts for at least 85 percent of cases.
- Familial CJD (fCJD): also called genetic or inherited. About 5 to 10 percent of cases of CJD in the United States are this type.
- Acquired/Iatrogenic CJD: is transmitted by exposure to brain or nervous system tissue, usually through certain medical procedures. Since CJD was first described in 1920, fewer than 1 percent of cases have been this type.
- Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD): is a new disease that was first described in March 1996. It is different from the classic forms of CJD. Variant CJD affects younger patients, has a longer course of illness, and is strongly linked to exposure, probably through food, to a disease known as "Mad Cow Disease."

Who gets CJD?
The risk of CJD increases with age, especially in persons over 55 years of age.

What are the signs and symptoms of CJD?
The symptoms of vCJD include noticeable social and behavioral changes, painful extremes of sense and touch, and slowing of brain function. CJD symptoms include dementia and early neurologic signs.

How is CJD treated?
There is no known treatment of CJD and all forms are fatal.

Can I get CJD from another person?
There is no evidence that CJD can be gotten through casual contact with a CJD patient.

How can CJD transmission be prevented?
Prions are not destroyed by cooking, washing, or boiling. Caregivers, health care workers, and others should take the following standard precautions when they are working with a person with CJD:

- Wash hands and exposed skin before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Cover cuts and abrasions with waterproof dressings.
- Wear surgical gloves when handling a patient's tissues and fluids or dressing the patient's wounds.
- Use a mask if there is a risk of splashing of body fluids.

Medical tools that have come in contact with the patient will need special handling after use.

People should never donate blood, tissues, or organs if they have suspected or confirmed CJD, or if they are at increased risk because of a family history of the disease, a dura mater graft, or other factor.

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. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - http://www.cdc.gov – is another excellent source of health information.