

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) Questions and Answers 2010

What is Eastern Equine Encephalitis? Eastern equine encephalitis is a rare but serious disease caused by the bite of an infected mosquito. Eastern equine encephalitis can infect humans, birds, mosquitoes, horses and some other mammals.

How is Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus spread to humans? The virus that causes Eastern equine encephalitis is spread only by mosquitoes. People and horses with Eastern equine encephalitis do not spread the disease.

Who is at risk of getting Eastern Equine Encephalitis? All residents of Maine who reside in areas where Eastern equine encephalitis virus has been identified in recent years are at risk of getting infected. People younger than 15 or older than 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe disease, if bitten by a mosquito that has the virus. However, please note NOT all mosquitoes can spread Eastern equine encephalitis.

What are some of the signs of Eastern Equine Encephalitis? The first signs of Eastern equine encephalitis may include high fever (103°-106°F), stiff neck, headache, lack of energy, and inflammation of the brain. The disease gets worse quickly and some patients may go into a coma within a week.

How soon do signs of Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus infection appear? Signs of Eastern equine encephalitis show up 3-10 days after a person is infected.

How is Eastern Equine Encephalitis diagnosed? Eastern equine encephalitis can only be diagnosed by a doctor. If you think you have any of the signs above, you should make an appointment to see your doctor as soon as you can. If your doctor suspects that you may have Eastern equine encephalitis, he or she will take your blood sample and draw a special fluid from your spinal cord (cerebral spinal fluid). Your doctor will then send these samples to the Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory for specific tests to be done to see if you have the virus that causes Eastern equine encephalitis.

What is the treatment for Eastern Equine Encephalitis? There is no cure for Eastern equine encephalitis. However, supportive care is recommended to lower fever and ease pressure on the brain.

Is there a vaccine I can get for Eastern Equine Encephalitis? Currently there is no human vaccine approved for Eastern equine encephalitis. However, vaccination for horses can be obtained by contacting a licensed veterinarian.

Is the risk of getting infected with Eastern Equine Encephalitis getting higher or lower each year? The risk of getting infected with Eastern equine encephalitis in Maine is relatively low at the current time. However, prevention methods are still stressed because infection is always possible.

What time of year am I most likely to get infected with Eastern Equine Encephalitis? People are at the highest risk of getting infected with Eastern equine encephalitis between the months of May and October.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting infected with Eastern Equine Encephalitis?

You can protect yourself and your family from Eastern equine encephalitis virus and other mosquito-borne viruses by taking the following actions:

- Use insect repellents that contain DEET
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks when outdoors
- Install or repair window screens
- Avoid being outdoors at dawn or dusk
- Drain standing water

More information about personal protection can be found by going to the federal CDC website (<http://www.cdc.gov/>).

Do all mosquitoes spread Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus? No, most mosquitoes do not spread the virus that causes Eastern equine encephalitis.

Where do mosquitoes live and breed? Mosquitoes lay their eggs in moist areas, such as standing water. The eggs become larvae that remain in the water until the adults mature and fly off. Weeds, tall grass, and shrubs provide an outdoor home for adult mosquitoes. They can also enter houses through unscreened windows or doors, or broken screens. Many mosquitoes will breed in containers that hold water, such as flowerpots or discarded tires.

How can I reduce the number of mosquitoes around my home and my neighborhood? To reduce mosquito populations around your home and neighborhood, get rid of any standing water that is available for mosquito breeding. Mosquitoes will begin to breed in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than 4 days. Here are some simple steps you can take:

- Get rid of or regularly empty any metal cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, and other water holding containers (including trash cans) on your property.
- Pay special attention to discarded tires that may have collected on your property. Stagnant water in tires is a common place for mosquitoes to breed.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outdoors, so that water can drain out.
- Clean clogged roof gutters; remove leaves and debris that may prevent drainage of rainwater.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Do not allow water to stagnate in birdbaths; aerate ornamental ponds or stock them with fish.
- Keep swimming pools clean and properly chlorinated; remove standing water from pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

Can my pet be infected? If you have any questions about the health of your pet or other domestic animals, you should call the state veterinarian at the Department of Agriculture at (207) 287-7613 or (207) 287-7615.

What is Maine CDC doing to protect Maine residents from getting infected with Eastern Equine Encephalitis? Maine CDC has developed a surveillance system to track the occurrence of Eastern equine encephalitis and other arboviruses, generally beginning in July and lasting through the end of September. Surveillance efforts include adult mosquito trapping and testing, testing of animals including llamas, alpacas, and horses, and testing people who are ill with symptoms similar to those of an arbovirus infection. In addition, the Maine CDC has been collaborating with other state agencies, health professionals and non-governmental groups to work together since 2000 to increase awareness and promote preventive measures.