

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is eastern equine encephalitis (EEE)?

Eastern equine encephalitis (en-sef-AH-ly-tis) is a rare but serious viral infection. This disease is most common in the eastern half of the United States and is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. EEE can affect humans, horses and some birds. The risk of getting EEE is highest from late July through early October.

Who gets EEE?

Anyone can get infected with the EEE virus. The virus can affect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito.

How do people get EEE?

The virus is spread by the bite of a mosquito infected with the EEE virus.

What are the symptoms of EEE?

Some people infected with EEE do not become ill and may not develop symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they may be mild or severe and show up 3 to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

- Mild symptoms such as flu-like illness with fever, headache, sore throat, stiff neck, lack of energy, muscle aches and confusion.
- Severe cases include swelling of the brain (encephalitis) which can lead to coma, convulsions and death.

How is EEE diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects EEE, samples of the patient's blood or spinal fluid will be examined.

Is there a treatment for people with EEE?

There is no specific treatment for EEE. Antibiotics are not effective against viral illnesses and anti-viral drugs have not shown to be effective for treating EEE. Most treatment focuses on supportive therapy to lower fever and ease pressure on the brain and spinal cord. In severe cases, hospitalization may be needed. It is estimated that 35% of the people who survive EEE will experience mild to severe disability.

Can people with EEE pass the illness to others?

The virus that causes EEE is spread only by mosquitoes. EEE is not spread between horses or from horses to people.

How can EEE be prevented?

Currently, no human EEE vaccine exists; there is an EEE vaccine for horses and birds. The best way to protect yourself from getting EEE is to prevent mosquito bites.

Follow these steps to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors at dusk or dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent such as those with DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. These products can be used on skin or clothing. Choose a product that provides protection for the amount of time spent outdoors. Permethrin is another type of insect repellent. It can only be used on clothing. ALWAYS follow the directions on the product label.

Mosquitoes begin to breed in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than four days. Get rid of mosquito breeding sites around the home.

- Clean out gutters and drains
- Dispose of old tires
- Drain standing water from pool covers and ditches
- Remove all containers that hold water
- Maintain pools, spas and saunas properly
- Change birdbath water every several days
- Make sure all windows and doors have screens and that all screens are in good condition.

Where can I get more information on EEE?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection: www.state.nj.us/dep/mosquito
- New Jersey Department of Agriculture: www.state.nj.us/agriculture
- New Jersey Mosquito Control Association: www.njmca.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/easternequineencephalitis

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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