



Encephalitis

What is encephalitis?

Encephalitis is an acute inflammatory disease involving parts of the brain, spinal cord and meninges caused by viruses as well as bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. Post-infectious encephalitis can occur after vaccination or respiratory infections.

How is it spread?

As this inflammatory disease is caused by many organisms, its spread is dependent on the cause.

Viruses and bacteria can spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions such as saliva, sputum or nasal secretions.

Enteroviruses can spread through fecal contamination (i.e. not washing hands after going to the toilet or changing a baby's diaper).

Arboviruses are spread by certain types of infected mosquitoes or ticks.

What are the symptoms?

Often people with viral encephalitis infections have no symptoms. Some people may have symptoms of a cold or stomach infection before encephalitis symptoms begin.

In mild cases symptoms often occur as fever, headache, body aches, fatigue and/or weakness.

Severe cases could experience headache, high fever, confusion, problems with speech, vision, or hearing, loss of consciousness, seizures and/or paralysis.

In post-infectious encephalitis, individuals may be confused, have seizures, headaches, stiffness of the neck, fever and trouble moving their legs and arms.

Signs and symptoms in infants and young children may also include bulging in the soft spots (fontanelles) of the skull in infants, nausea and vomiting, body stiffness, inconsolable crying, poor feeding or not waking for a feeding and irritability.

Most people recover fully, however, spinal involvement may lead to paraplegia or quadriplegia.

How soon do symptoms of encephalitis appear?

It depends on the organism causing the disease. For primary viral encephalitis, the symptoms may start within 5-15 days.

How is encephalitis diagnosed?

Along with an examination, your health care provider may order various laboratory testing to assist in determining the type of organism; as well as, order diagnostic tests to confirm the presence of infection and inflammation.

What is the treatment for encephalitis?

Your health care provider will provide supportive treatment based on your symptoms.

How do I protect myself and others?

The following are helpful in preventing the spread of any illness:

- Cover mouth and nose when coughing and/or sneezing.
- Do not drink from the same glass, water bottle, cup, straw or pop can as others.
- Do not share cigarettes.
- Wash hands well after coughing, sneezing, going to the washroom, prior to eating and before food preparation. This is important because hand to mouth contact is a common way of spreading many infections.
- There is no immunization to prevent encephalitis, however routine immunization is still recommended.
- Use personal protective measures to avoid insect bites including repellents, protective clothing and stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dusk to dawn).

Are there any special concerns about encephalitis?

It is recommended that you seek medical attention if symptoms of encephalitis develop.

Anyone can get encephalitis. People with weakened immune systems, including those persons with HIV or those taking immunosuppressant drugs, are at increased risk.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809



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