

Encephalitis

Reporting Obligations

Encephalitis is designated as a disease of public health significance and is reportable under the *Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act*. Report all suspect and confirmed cases **within one business day** to the health unit.

REPORTING FORM

Epidemiology

Aetiologic Agent:

Encephalitis is an acute inflammatory disease involving parts of the brain, spinal cord and meninges caused by specific viruses, as well as bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. Post-infectious encephalitis can occur after vaccination or respiratory infections. The most common viruses implicated are measles, rubella, smallpox, and chicken pox.

Clinical Presentation:

Most viral encephalitis infections are asymptomatic; mild cases often have febrile headache; severe infections are usually differentiated by acute onset, with headache, high fever, meningeal signs, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, and spastic paralysis.

In post-infectious encephalitis, cases usually present with confusion, seizures, headaches, stiffness of the neck and fever.

Modes of transmission:

Depends on causative agent.

Incubation Period:

Depends on causative agent. For primary viral encephalitis the incubation period is usually 5-15 days.

Period of Communicability:

Varies depending on the causative agent.

Risk Factors/Susceptibility

Susceptibility to clinical disease is usually highest in infancy and in old age.

- Immunization in the last 3 weeks
- Infectious illness in last 10 days
- Exposure to certain vectors (e.g., mosquitos)

Diagnosis & Laboratory Testing

Cases are confirmed if a patient has clinically compatible signs and symptoms of encephalitis along with isolation of organism from an appropriate specimen (e.g., cerebrospinal fluid or stool), detection of a specific antigen, or serologic confirmation of infection with an organism known to cause encephalitis.

Arbovirus Testing Intake Form is required for certain diseases. Please consult the PHO Test Information Index for additional instructions.

TESTING INFORMATION & REQUISITION

Treatment & Case Management

Treatment is mainly supportive and is under the care of the attending Health Care Provider.

Public Health will follow up as needed.

Patient Information

PATIENT FACT SHEET

References

1. [Ministry of Health, Infectious Diseases Protocol - Ontario Public Health Standards, 2022.](#)

Additional Resources

1. [PHAC. "Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Pathogen Safety Data Sheet-Infectious Substances."](#)
2. [CDC. "Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Symptoms and Treatment."](#)
3. [PHO. "Eastern Equine Encephalitis Virus, History and Enhanced Surveillance in Ontario."](#)
4. [Simcoe Muskoka HealthStats: Encephalitis/Meningitis](#)