

EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Eastern Equine Encephalitis?

Eastern Equine Encephalitis, or EEE, is a very rare but serious disease caused by a virus that is transmitted to humans and horses through mosquito bites. This form of encephalitis occurs mainly along the Eastern seaboard of the United States, on the eastern Gulf coast, and in some inland Midwestern states.

What is the EEE virus?

The EEE virus is one of many viruses in the **arbovirus** family, which is shorthand for **arthropod-borne virus**. The most common arthropods for transmitting viruses that cause disease are blood-sucking insects, especially mosquitoes.

How is Eastern Equine Encephalitis spread?

The virus that causes EEE lives almost exclusively in the bloodstream of infected birds, and in the mosquitoes that bite those birds. The mosquitoes that bite birds greatly prefer birds over horses or people. On rare occasions an infected bird will be bitten by a mosquito that bites both birds and people (and other animals, such as horses), and in that rare situation the virus can “spill over” into a person. The risk of getting EEE, although small, rises during July through September. The adult female mosquitoes that carry the EEE virus are killed by frost in the fall, but the virus can overwinter in birds.

What is the treatment for EEE?

There is no specific treatment. There are no useful antibiotics or anti-viral drugs. Medical care is intensively supportive. EEE cannot be passed directly from person to person.

What can we do to prevent EEE?

There is no vaccine for people, but there is a vaccine for horses, which should be vaccinated every spring. The best way to protect yourself is to avoid mosquito bites as much as possible by using repellents. Insect repellents containing 20-30% DEET work best. Follow the label instructions carefully. Do not use repellents on children younger than two years of age. Limit outdoor activity in the evening, when mosquitoes are most active. Maintain window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out. Reduce mosquito populations: eliminate all standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters, and other containers. Avoid shaded areas where mosquitoes may be resting. Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and pants.

SYMPTOMS OF EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS

- Abrupt onset of fever
 - Headache
 - Body aching
 - Disorientation
- Change in level of consciousness
- Varying paralysis
 - Coma

Most severe in infants and older adults, and has a high fatality rate.



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