

Encephalitis

What is encephalitis?

Encephalitis (swelling of the brain) can be caused by many things. Arboviral encephalitis is caused by a virus that is spread to people through the bites of infected insects – usually mosquitoes. Arboviral encephalitis can cause very serious problems and even death for infants and very old people.

Arboviral encephalitis facts

The three types of arboviral encephalitis in Colorado are Western equine encephalitis (WEE), West Nile virus (WNV) and St. Louis encephalitis (SLE). You can only get these viruses when an infected mosquito bites you.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually begin 5-15 days after being bitten by a mosquito. Most people who are infected with these viruses do not experience any symptoms, or experience mild symptoms such as a fever and headache that lasts for a few days. The small number of infected people who develop encephalitis have symptoms that occur quickly and may include:

- Headache
- High Fever
- Tremors
- Occasional convulsions – usually only a symptom in infants
- Stupor
- Disorientation
- Coma
- Spastic paralysis – a rare symptom

Prevention

The health department monitors for arboviral encephalitis and increases in mosquito populations. If arboviral encephalitis becomes a threat, the health department informs and educates the public about potential risks and how to prevent the disease. The best way to prevent the arboviral encephalitis is to avoid mosquitoes and prevent mosquito bites.

Avoid mosquitoes:

- Apply mosquito repellent to exposed skin. Follow repellent directions carefully.
- Plan outdoor activities during daylight hours or later in the evening when mosquitoes are less active. Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk. Wear long sleeves and pants at these times or stay indoors.
- Avoid trees, bushes and high grass where mosquitoes may be hiding during the day.
- Avoid wearing perfumes or scented products; they may attract mosquitoes.
- Make sure all door and window screens are in good condition so that mosquitoes cannot get into your house.
- Get rid of any standing water around your home. Mosquitoes breed in as little as ½ inch of standing water such as puddles, buckets or any other container that might catch rain water and hold it for a few days. Emptying and cleaning things like bird baths and pet's water dishes every few days will also help keep mosquitoes away.

Treatment for encephalitis

Currently there is no treatment for these viruses. Most people will fully recover without complications.



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