

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

ST. LOUIS ENCEPHALITIS VIRUS DISEASE

St. Louis encephalitis is a mosquito-borne virus that is only known in the Western hemisphere. Large epidemics have occurred in North America. The most recent and largest epidemic of St. Louis encephalitis virus disease occurred in 1975 in the Midwest, resulting in 1,815 cases, of which many were from Ohio. Cases in Ohio occur primarily in the late summer or early fall.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually begin within 5 to 15 days after a mosquito bite.

- 99% of infections have no symptoms.
- Symptoms usually start suddenly and include fever, headache, nausea, dizziness, and tiredness.
- After a few days or a week, the ill person may recover on their own, but could also get worse as the infection attacks the brain.
- Severe infections: sudden headache, high fever, neck stiffness, confusion, tremors, unsteadiness, unconsciousness, paralysis, or death.
- The illness is fatal in about 5-15% of cases. Serious illness and death may be more likely in older adults.



Transmission

- St. Louis encephalitis spreads by the bites from infected mosquitoes. Even one mosquito bite is enough to pass the disease.
- Mosquitoes usually become infected when they feed on birds carrying the virus. Infected mosquitoes then transmit the virus to other birds or humans when they bite them.
- The disease cannot be transmitted directly from person to person.



Treatment

- Blood or spinal fluid can be tested for antibodies.
- There is no specific treatment. Care centers on treatment of symptoms and complications.
- Once infected, people are immune. However, a person can still get other mosquito-borne viruses.



Prevention

- Protect yourself from mosquito bites:
 - Use mosquito repellents on skin and clothing.
 - Campers should consider using bed nets.
 - Wear light-colored clothing.
 - Stay in screened or indoor areas during the peak mosquito biting times of dawn, dusk and evening.
 - Wear long pants, long sleeves, and/or socks if possible.
- Eliminate mosquito breeding sites by covering or discarding items that collect water outdoors (for example, rain gutters,

buckets, or used tires). Empty containers of standing water weekly.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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