

Japanese Encephalitis

What is Japanese encephalitis?

Japanese encephalitis is a viral infection that can cause inflammation of the brain. Japanese encephalitis occurs in many Asian countries – usually in rural or agricultural areas but occasionally in urban centres. The infection is caused by a virus that can be spread to humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes. Most people who become infected with Japanese encephalitis do not become ill, but the infection can cause permanent disability or death in some individuals.

What are the symptoms of Japanese encephalitis?

The majority of people who become infected with the Japanese encephalitis virus do not become ill. However, some people may experience a mild illness with a fever and headache. In rarer instances a severe case may develop, with sudden onset of headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor and disorientation. Tremors, occasional convulsions and coma may also occur. If symptoms are going to occur, they will develop within two to five days after exposure to the virus.

Fifty per cent of people who develop a severe case of Japanese encephalitis may experience permanent neurological damage and 10 to 25 per cent of severe cases can result in death.

How does Japanese encephalitis spread?

The Culex mosquito is a common carrier of the Japanese encephalitis virus, and transmits it to humans and animals during the feeding process. These mosquitoes tend to bite in the evening or at night, but day-biting species are found in some areas. The risk of transmission depends on the region being visited, the time of year, and the type of outdoor activities undertaken.

A person cannot become ill with Japanese encephalitis through contact with an infected person.

How is Japanese encephalitis prevented?

A series of vaccinations may be advised for protection against Japanese encephalitis, and should be considered if you are going to an area where this infection is common, especially if you will:

- be there for one month or more, or
- visit rural areas with extensive outdoor exposure, or
- be there during transmission season

To determine if you should be vaccinated, discuss your itinerary and your personal health factors with a physician specializing in travel medicine before your departure.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

While this immunization offers protection to most people who receive it, it is also important to protect yourself from mosquito bites:

- Stay in well-screened or completely enclosed, air-conditioned accommodation
- Sleep under permethrine-treated bed nets
- Wear light-coloured clothing that reduces the amount of exposed skin
- Use insect repellent containing DEET

How is Japanese Encephalitis treated?

There is no cure or specific drug treatment for Japanese encephalitis. See your physician for treatment of the symptoms.

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