

La Crosse Encephalitis

Public Information Sheet

What is La Crosse encephalitis?

Encephalitis means “inflammation of the brain.” A virus causes La Crosse Encephalitis and it spreads through the bite of infected mosquitoes. La Crosse Encephalitis can infect people, chipmunks, and squirrels.

What are the symptoms of La Crosse encephalitis?

Most people with La Crosse infection do not get sick. Some people have headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, and confusion. In severe cases, people may have seizures or go into a coma. La Crosse is rarely fatal, but children may have headaches, seizures, or other problems after they get well.

Who is most at risk for La Crosse encephalitis?

Children under the age of 16 are most at risk, but disease can occur at any age. Children are more likely to get the infection if:

They live near the woods;

There are cans, bottles, tires, or other containers that hold water lying around their house or play areas; or

They play outdoors frequently during June through October.

Is La Crosse encephalitis a problem in West Virginia?

West Virginia reports around 15 to 50 cases of La Crosse encephalitis per year.

How is La Crosse encephalitis spread?

La Crosse encephalitis is spread by the treehole mosquito (*Oc. triseriatus*) and Asian tiger mosquito (*St. albopicta*). This mosquito lives in the woods and lays eggs only in treeholes or containers that hold water. Tires, cans, bottles, buckets, tire swings, toys, or any container that hold water can allow the treehole mosquito to breed near your home.

How can I protect my family from La Crosse encephalitis?

Remove standing water to get rid of mosquitoes:

- Get rid of old tires and trash around your home.
- Punch holes in the bottoms of trash barrels so they don't hold water.

Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program

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- At least once or twice a week, clean and empty water from flowerpots, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels and cans.
- Check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out so they drain properly.
- Maintain swimming pools or drain them completely.

Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.

Avoid outside activities when mosquitoes are active.

Use insect repellent on bare skin.

- DEET and Picaridin are the best repellents. Repellents that contain oil of lemon eucalyptus work as well as low-strength DEET.
- Follow package directions carefully.
- Apply sparingly to children and wash them with soap and water when they come indoors. Avoid application to the hands and face of young children.

Make sure doors and screens are bug tight.

Contact your doctor if you feel ill.

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