

# Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is acute flaccid myelitis (AFM)?

Acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) is a condition that affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord, which can cause the muscles and reflexes in the body not to work normally. It is a syndrome characterized by sudden onset of limb weakness. In many cases, distinctive lesions in the gray matter (nerve cells) of the spinal cord can be seen on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). AFM can result from viral infections.

### Who gets AFM?

Anyone can get AFM, but most cases reported are in children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has not yet determined who is at higher risk for developing AFM, or the reasons why they may be at higher risk.

### How do people get AFM?

AFM can be caused by a variety of viral infections, including enteroviruses (such as enterovirus D68), flaviviruses (such as West Nile virus), herpesviruses, and adenoviruses. It is not known why some people develop AFM after a viral infection and others don't.

### What are the symptoms of AFM?

Most patients with AFM will have sudden onset of weakness or paralysis of one or more limbs and loss of muscle tone and reflexes. Some patients may also experience:

- Facial droop/weakness
- Difficulty moving the eyes
- Drooping eyelids
- Difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech

Numbness or tingling is rare in patients with AFM, though some patients have pain in their arms or legs. Some patients with AFM may be unable to pass urine. The most severe symptom of AFM is respiratory failure that can happen when the muscles involved with breathing become weak. This can require urgent ventilator support.

### How is AFM diagnosed?

AFM is diagnosed based on a combination of symptoms and diagnostic tests. MRIs can be very helpful in diagnosing cases of AFM. A doctor can tell the difference between AFM and other diseases with a careful examination of the nervous system, looking at the location of the weakness, muscle tone, and reflexes. CDC is working to determine diagnostic criteria that would easily distinguish AFM from other illnesses that cause limb weakness.

**What is the treatment for AFM?**

There is no specific treatment for AFM. A neurologist may recommend certain treatments on a case-by-case basis. CDC has some guidance available for medical providers to help manage the care of patients with AFM.

**How can AFM be prevented?**

There is no specific action to prevent AFM, but it is always important to practice disease prevention steps. Being up-to-date on all recommended vaccinations, hand washing, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and taking steps to prevent mosquito bites are some ways to protect against diseases that may cause AFM.

**Where can I get more information?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department [localhealth.nj.gov](http://localhealth.nj.gov)
- NJ Department of Health [nj.gov/health/](http://nj.gov/health/)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/index.html](http://cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/index.html)

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