

St. Louis Encephalitis

Frequently Asked Questions

What is St. Louis encephalitis (SLE)?

St. Louis encephalitis (en-sef-AH-ly-tis) is a rare but serious viral infection. This disease is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito.

Who gets SLE?

Anyone can get infected with the SLE virus. The virus can affect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito.

What are the symptoms of SLE?

Some people infected with SLE do not become ill and may not develop symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they range from mild to severe. Symptoms show up 3 to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

- Mild symptoms include flu-like illness with fever, headache, neck stiffness, tremors, dizziness, weakness and confusion.
- Severe symptoms include swelling of the brain (encephalitis) which can lead to coma, convulsions and death.

How is SLE diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects SLE, samples of the patient's blood or spinal fluid will be examined.

What is the treatment for SLE?

There is no specific treatment for SLE. Antibiotics are not effective against viral illnesses and anti-viral drugs have not shown to be effective for treating SLE. Most treatment focuses on supportive therapy to lower fever and ease pressure on the brain and spinal cord. In severe cases, hospitalization may be needed.

Can people with SLE pass the illness to others?

The virus that causes SLE is spread only by mosquitoes. SLE is not spread from person to person.

How can SLE be prevented?

Currently, no human SLE vaccine exists. The best way to protect yourself from getting SLE is to prevent mosquito bites.

Follow these steps to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors at dusk or dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent such as those with DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. These products can be used on skin or clothing. Choose a product that provides protection for the amount of time spent outdoors. Permethrin is another type of insect repellent. It can only be used on clothing. ALWAYS follow the directions on the product label.

Mosquitoes begin to breed in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than four days. Get rid of mosquito breeding sites around the home.

- Clean out gutters and drains
- Dispose of old tires
- Drain standing water from pool covers and ditches
- Remove all containers that hold water
- Maintain pools, spas and saunas properly
- Change birdbath water every several days
- Make sure all windows and doors have screens and that all screens are in good condition.

Where can I get more information on SLE?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/sle/index.html

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.