

La Crosse Encephalitis (LAC)

Public Information Sheet

What is La Crosse encephalitis?

Encephalitis means “inflammation of the brain.” La Crosse encephalitis is caused by a virus 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 may develop a mild illness with symptoms of 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 15 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 May through October near areas where mosquitoes breed.

Is La Crosse encephalitis a problem in West Virginia?

In 2012, 14 cases of La Crosse encephalitis were reported in West Virginia. In the past, as many as 50 cases have been reported in West Virginia in a single year.

How is La Crosse encephalitis spread?

La Crosse encephalitis is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. The eastern treehole mosquito (*Ae. triseriatus*), the Asian tiger mosquito (*Ae. albopictus*), and the Asian bush mosquito (*Ae. japonicus*). These mosquitoes can live in the woods and lay eggs in treeholes or containers that hold water. Tires, rain barrels, childrens' wading pools, cans, bottles, buckets, tire swings, toys, or any container that holds water can allow mosquitoes to breed near your home.

Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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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.
- At least once or twice a week, clean and empty water from flowerpots, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, and barrels.
- 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 (usually dusk and dawn).

Use insect repellent on bare skin.

- DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR₃₅₃₅ are effective. Do not apply oil of eucalyptus to children less than 3 years old.
- Follow insect repellent 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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