

EEE: Protect Yourself

Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) is a rare virus that is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes. EEE virus (EEEV) is one of a group of mosquito-transmitted viruses that can cause inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). It takes 4 to 10 days after the bite from an infected mosquito for symptoms to develop.

Symptoms include chills, fever, headache, nausea/vomiting, and joint stiffness. The illness lasts one to two weeks and recovery is complete when there is no central nervous system involvement. Severe cases, which are rare, involve brain swelling and symptoms can progress to disorientation, seizures and coma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately a third of all people with EEE dies from the disease. There is no vaccine or preventive drug.

How can people reduce the chance of being infected with EEEV?

The most effective way is to prevent mosquito bites. Avoid areas where mosquitoes are out and avoid peak biting time (dusk to dawn). If you will be outside, wear long sleeves, pants and socks and use an insect repellent.

Select an insect repellent that carries a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Registration number on the label, which proves that it is both safe and effective. These include repellents with DEET. The amount of DEET in a product can range from 10 percent to more than 30 percent. Products with a higher concentration of DEET do not provide better protection but they do provide longer protection. A 20 percent concentration provides about four hours of protection. Insect repellents that are lotions with DEET (as opposed to aerosol sprays) are easier to apply and may work better.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health also recommends one natural product, oil of lemon eucalyptus, which provides as much protection as low concentrations of DEET.

When using insect repellent, follow the product directions carefully. Apply to clothes and exposed skin but do not apply under clothing. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend insect repellent for children younger than 2 months. On older children, concentrations of 30 percent or less are acceptable.

The Massachusetts DPH reported that there have been seven confirmed cases of EEE. Aerial spraying of affected areas in Bristol County has been completed. The DPH advises people to continue to take personal precautions against mosquito bites. For the most updated information on EEE risk in your town, visit the DPH website at www.mosquitoresults.com for mosquito results, maps and incidence of positive mosquito samples. For general information on EEE, visit <http://www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito>.