

# Frequently Asked Questions About Encephalitis

## Eastern Equine, St. Louis, and West Nile

### Q. What is encephalitis?

A. Encephalitis is a mosquito borne disease that usually results in a mild infection. More serious infections can result in inflammation of the brain. There are currently three major types of encephalitis in Duval County, Eastern Equine (EEE), St. Louis (SLE), and West Nile (WN). Encephalitis is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito (primarily the *Culex* species) that becomes infected with encephalitis virus.



*Culex* species mosquito

### Q. What is the basic transmission cycle?

A. Mosquitoes become infected by feeding on birds infected with the encephalitis virus. Infected mosquitoes then transmit the encephalitis virus to humans and animals during the feeding process. The encephalitis virus grows both in the infected mosquito and the infected bird, but does not make either one sick.

### Q. Could you get the encephalitis from another person?

A. No, encephalitis virus is **NOT** transmitted from person-to-person. For example, you cannot get the virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease, or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease.

### Q. Could you get encephalitis directly from birds or from insects other than mosquitoes?

A. No, only infected mosquitoes can transmit encephalitis virus.

### Q. What are the symptoms of encephalitis?

A. Symptoms usually develop 5 to 15 days after exposure. Mild infections occur without apparent symptoms other than fever with headache. More severe infection is marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, occasional convulsions (especially in infants) and spastic (but rarely flaccid) paralysis.

### Q. How is encephalitis treated?

A. There is no specific therapy. Intensive supportive therapy is indicated. Currently, a vaccine is not available for humans.

### Q. Who is at risk for getting encephalitis?

A. Anyone can develop encephalitis. However, people with weakened immune systems, people under the age of 10 and over the age of 50 are possibly at higher risk for developing more serious symptoms when infected.

### Q. What can I do to reduce my risk of getting encephalitis?

A. Limit exposure to mosquitoes and mosquito bites.

- ? Minimize time spent outdoors at dawn and dusk, which is when mosquitoes are most active.
- ? Wear shoes, pants, and long sleeves when outdoors for long periods of time. Light colored, tightly woven clothing is recommended.
- ? Use insect repellents according to the manufacturer's instructions. Repellents containing 10% to 35% DEET are effective. For children, repellents should not contain more than 10% DEET.
- ? Make sure door and window screens fit properly and are in good repair.
- ? Reduce the amount of standing water available for mosquito breeding.

### Q. Where can I get more information on encephalitis?

A. Refer to the CDC Web site at [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov) for more information on encephalitis, SLE, EEE, or WN virus, or refer to your local county health department epidemiology unit at (904) 630-3246. *Information for this fact sheet came from the CDC web site and the Duval County Department of Health.*



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