

St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE)

Public Information Sheet

What is St. Louis encephalitis?

Encephalitis means “inflammation of the brain.” A virus causes St. Louis encephalitis (SLE) and it spreads through the bite of mosquitoes. SLE causes disease mostly in humans and birds.

What are the symptoms of St. Louis Encephalitis?

Most people with SLE infection have no symptoms. Symptoms may be very mild (fever and headache) or more severe: headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures, and/or paralysis. Among patients with symptoms, the death rate is 3 to 30 percent.

Who is most at risk for St. Louis Encephalitis?

People who engage in outdoor work and recreational activities in areas that have identified active cases are at a higher risk of becoming infected. Persons over the age of 50 seem to be at the greatest risk for developing severe SLE when infected with the virus.

Is St. Louis Encephalitis a problem in West Virginia?

West Virginia has not reported cases of SLE in recent years. SLE has been found in West Virginia in the past.

How is St. Louis Encephalitis spread?

SLE is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. You cannot get SLE from another person.

How can I protect my family from St. Louis 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, barrels and cans.
- 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.

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Use insect repellent on bare skin.

- DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 are effective.
- Follow package 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.