

ST. LOUIS ENCEPHALITIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is St. Louis Encephalitis?

St. Louis Encephalitis, or SLE, is a rare but serious viral disease that is transmitted to humans and animals through mosquito bites. This form of encephalitis is found in most of the United States.

What is the SLE virus?

The SLE virus is one of many viruses in the **arbovirus** family, which is shorthand for **arthropod-borne virus**. The most common arthropods for transmitting viruses that cause disease are blood-sucking insects, especially mosquitoes.

How is St. Louis Encephalitis spread?

The virus that causes SLE lives almost exclusively in the bloodstream of infected birds, and in the mosquitoes that bite those birds. The mosquitoes that bite birds greatly prefer birds over animals or people. On rare occasions an infected bird will be bitten by a mosquito that bites both birds and people (and other animals), and in that rare situation the virus can “spill over” into a person. The risk of getting SLE, although extremely small, rises during July through September. The adult female mosquitoes that carry SLE are usually killed by frost in the fall, but the virus can last all year in birds. A person who has the disease cannot spread the virus.

What is the treatment for SLE?

There is no specific treatment. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Severe illnesses are treated by supportive therapy.

What can we do to prevent SLE?

There is no vaccine for people. The best way to protect yourself is to avoid mosquito bites as much as possible, by:

- √ using repellents. Insect repellents containing 20-30% DEET work best. Follow the label instructions carefully. Do not use repellents on children younger than two years of age.
- √ limiting outdoor activity in the evening, when mosquitoes are most active.
- √ maintaining window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out.
- √ reducing mosquito populations; eliminate all standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters, and other containers.
- √ avoiding shaded areas where mosquitoes may be resting.
- √ wearing protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and pants.

SYMPTOMS OF ST. LOUIS ENCEPHALITIS

Symptoms occur 5-15 days after exposure:

- abrupt onset of fever
- headache
- tiredness
- dizziness

In its most severe form, the disease can cause high fever, stiff neck, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions and death.

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