



ACUTE FLACCID MYELITIS

What is acute flaccid myelitis?

Acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) is a neurological condition sometimes developed after infection with some viruses. It is not exclusive to a specific virus and can be caused by enteroviruses, flaviviruses, herpesviruses, and adenoviruses. The diseases caused by these viruses can vary anywhere from West Nile virus to a common cold.

Who gets AFM?

Though anyone can develop AFM, more than 90% of documented cases have been in young children.

How is AFM spread?

AFM is not spread directly person to person. Viruses that can cause AFM are usually spread by contact with sick people.

What are the symptoms of AFM?

The most common symptoms of AFM are sudden weaknesses in joints and muscles and a loss of muscle tone and reflexes. This can occur in the limbs, making movement difficult. Severe symptoms include weakening of muscles required for breathing and temperature regulation, which can be lethal without medical care.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Most patients experience acute flaccid weakness one to two weeks after previous illness.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Because AFM occurs after infection with a virus and is not directly contagious, exclusion is not necessary once the patient has recovered from their initial infection.

What is the treatment for AFM?

Research is still being conducted on how to best treat AFM. Clinicians recommend therapeutic treatment on a case-by-case basis. Physical or occupational therapies for muscle strengthening may improve long-term outcomes.

What can a person or community do to prevent AFM?

Lowering the risk of viral infection is the best way to prevent AFM. Staying up to date on recommended vaccinations, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and washing hands frequently can help prevent illness. Remaining home while sick and disinfecting high-touch surfaces can lower the change of spreading viruses to others.



*DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES*
Division of Public Health

Frequently Asked Questions

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/prevention/index.html>

Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

Revised: 11/2024
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