



GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

What is Guillain-Barré syndrome?

Guillain-Barré (Ghee-YAN Bah-RAY) syndrome (GBS) happens when a person's own immune system harms their body's nerves. This harm causes muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. GBS is rare. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that only about 3,000 to 6,000 people develop GBS each year in the United States.

Several things can lead to GBS, including:

- **Diarrhea or a respiratory illness:** About two in every three people with GBS had diarrhea (loose stools) or a respiratory illness several weeks before developing GBS symptoms.
- **Viral infections:** Some people with GBS had the flu or infections with cytomegalovirus, Epstein Barr virus, Zika virus, or other viruses.
- **Vaccination:** Very rarely, people have developed GBS in the days or weeks after getting certain vaccines. However, the benefits of vaccination far outweigh risks. For example, studies show that people have a greater chance of getting GBS after getting the flu than they do after getting vaccinated against the flu.

Infection with *Campylobacter jejuni*, which causes diarrhea (loose stools), is one of the most common causes of GBS.

Who gets Guillain-Barré syndrome?

Anyone can develop GBS. However, in the United States, it is more common in men and adults older than 50.

How is Guillain-Barré syndrome spread?

GBS is not contagious. An outbreak of GBS can happen if more than one person in an outbreak, such as an outbreak of *Campylobacter* infections, develops GBS.

What are the symptoms of Guillain-Barré syndrome?

Early symptoms of GBS include weakness and tingling. People with GBS usually first feel these symptoms in both legs. Some people then have weakness and tingling in their arms and upper body. The weakness can increase until people cannot use some muscles. In severe cases, people can become paralyzed.



How soon do Guillain-Barré syndrome symptoms appear?

Most GBS symptoms usually start a few days or weeks following a respiratory or gastrointestinal viral infection.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Exclusions are not necessary unless the individual has a contagious viral infection that caused GBS.

What is the treatment for Guillain-Barré syndrome?

Common treatments include the following:

- Plasma exchange (a procedure that removes and replaces the liquid part of the blood)
- High-dose immunoglobulin therapy (an infusion of antibodies).

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of Guillain-Barré syndrome?

There is no way to prevent GBS.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/campylobacter/guillain-barre.html>

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke,
<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/guillain-barre-syndrome-fact-sheet>