



Jackson County Health Department

St. Louis Encephalitis



What is St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE)?

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

How is SLE 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 infect people. 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.

How is SLE treated?

There is no specific treatment. Antibiotics are not effective against this virus. Medical care is provided to treat symptoms and complications.

How can SLE be prevented?

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 early morning and evening hours, 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 SLE:

- Abrupt onset of fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Stiff neck
- Stupor
- Disorientation
- Coma
- Tremors
- Convulsions
- Death

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CDC Public Information

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