Pennsylvania Department of Health

La Crosse Virus Fact Sheet

Background

La Crosse virus (LACV) is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito, particularly the eastern tree hole mosquito (*Aedes triseriatus*). This virus is closely related to other mosquito-borne viruses that can also infect humans, including Jamestown Canyon virus and snowshoe hare virus. Disease cases are most common in the upper midwestern, northeastern, and southeastern United States. They mostly occur in late spring to early fall but can also occur in the winter if mosquitoes are still active. Although LACV is rare in Pennsylvania, there is evidence of low levels of transmission in southern and western counties. LACV is endemic in Ohio, and Ohio has reported more human cases than any other state in the United States, averaging about 20 cases per year.

Who does the issue impact?

People who spend more time in woodland habitats are at higher risk of infection as they are more exposed to the mosquitoes that transmit the virus. However, LACV can infect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito.

Complications

Most cases are asymptomatic or result in mild disease. However, in severe cases, the virus may cause meningitis (inflammation of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord) or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). People with severe disease may experience long-term effects such as seizures or behavioral issues. Severe cases are more common in people under the age of 16. Death is rare but does occur in some cases (less than 1%).

Signs and symptoms

The incubation period (the time from being bitten by a mosquito until you develop symptoms) for LACV infection ranges from 5 to 15 days. The majority of people who are infected with La Crosse virus do not develop any symptoms. People who develop symptoms may experience fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, lethargy (reduced activity or alertness), and fatigue (feeling tired). More severe disease may occur in some people, especially children under the age of 16. Symptoms of severe disease may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, stupor (near unconsciousness), disorientation, coma, seizures, muscles weakness, vision loss, numbness, speech problems, and paralysis.

Causes and transmission

In the environment, LACV circulates between mosquitoes and wild animals like squirrels and chipmunks. The virus can be spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Infected humans do not transmit the virus to mosquitoes that feed on them. People also cannot spread the virus by coughing, sneezing, or touching others.

Tests and diagnosis

Health care providers use many factors to diagnose LACV infection, including signs, symptoms, history of living or traveling to places where LACV is present, history of exposure to mosquitoes, and laboratory testing. Laboratory testing may include tests to detect viral particles or antibodies in blood or spinal fluid.

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Treatment

There are no vaccines to prevent LACV infection and there are no medications available to treat infections. Rest, fluids, and pain medication may help alleviate symptoms. For severe cases, patients may need to be hospitalized for more intensive supportive care.

What can you do?

To prevent LACV:

- Use EPA approved insect repellent
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants to cover your skin
- Treat your clothing and gear with the insecticide permethrin
- Take steps to control mosquitoes indoors and outdoors by:
  - Maintaining good screens on windows and doors to keep infected mosquitoes out.
  - Regularly emptying any outside containers, or drill drainage holes in their bottoms.
  - Turning over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
  - Cleaning clogged roof gutters that may allow the pooling of rainwater.
  - Not allowing water to stagnate in bird baths or ornamental ponds.
  - Cleaning and chlorinating swimming pools and removing standing water from pool covers.
  - Using landscaping to eliminate standing water that routinely collects on your property.
  - Removing discarded tires from your property as they make an excellent larva habitat.
  - Using Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (Bti) tablets for standing water that can't be eliminated; available at any lawn and garden store. The bacteria will infect and kill any mosquito larvae present, but the water will remain safe for people, pets, aquatic life and plants.

If you or a family member think you might have symptoms consistent with LACV

- Talk with your health care provider immediately

Resources for more information

- PA DOH Vectorborne Disease webpage: Vectorborne Diseases
- CDC LACV website: https://www.cdc.gov/la-crosse-encephalitis/about/index.html

This fact sheet provides general information.
Please contact your physician for specific clinical information. If you have any questions, contact us at **1-877-PA-HEALTH.**

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