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Acute Flaccid Myelitis

Due to cases of Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM) across the country and a recently confirmed case in Ohio, the Warren County Health District (WCHD) would like to share information with residents regarding the disease.

AFM is a rare but serious condition. AFM affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord. AFM can be caused by a variety of germs, including several viruses: enteroviruses, West Nile virus, and adenoviruses. Environmental toxins and genetic disorders may also cause AFM. AFM is only one of a number of conditions that can result in neurologic illness with limb weakness. Oftentimes, however, a cause for AFM cannot be identified.

AFM symptoms can include sudden onset of arm or leg weakness and loss of muscle tone and reflexes. Some people, in addition to arm or leg weakness, will have facial droop/weakness, difficulty moving the eyes, drooping eyelids, or difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech. If you or your child develop any of these symptoms you should seek medical care right away.

AFM is diagnosed by examining a patient's nervous system in combination with reviewing pictures of the spinal cord. A doctor can examine a patient's nervous system and the places on the body where he or she has weakness, poor muscle tone, and decreased reflexes. A doctor can also do an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) to look at a patient's brain and spinal cord, do lab tests on the cerebrospinal fluid (the fluid around the brain and spinal cord), and may check nerve conduction (impulse sent along a nerve fiber) and response. It is important that the tests are done as soon as possible after the patient develops symptoms. Although there is no specific treatment for AFM, a doctor who specializes in treating brain and spinal cord illnesses may recommend certain interventions on a case by case basis.

Recommendations for preventing AFM include being up to date on all recommended vaccinations (including poliovirus), protecting yourself from mosquito-borne viruses by using mosquito repellent, staying indoors after dusk and by removing standing or stagnant water from nearby property to minimize the number of mosquitoes present. Although we don't know if it is effective in preventing AFM, you can also wash your hands often with soap and water, avoid close contact with sick people and clean surfaces with a disinfectant, especially surfaces that a sick person has touched.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is actively investigating AFM cases and monitoring disease activity. They are working closely with healthcare providers and state and local health departments to increase awareness for AFM. CDC is encouraging healthcare providers to recognize and report suspected cases of AFM to their health departments, and for health departments to send this information to CDC to help us understand the nationwide burden of AFM. CDC is also actively looking for risk factors and possible causes of this condition by encouraging healthcare providers to monitor AFM in patients and sending information to local health departments.

The WCHD will continue to work with health care providers, Ohio Department of Health, local partners and CDC to identify and investigate suspect cases and to educate the public as information becomes available.

For more information visit www.warrenhd.com or www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis

Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM) Fact Sheet



Acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) is a condition that affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord, which can result from a variety of causes. Practicing good hygiene is one way to protect yourself and your family from diseases that can cause AFM.

What are the symptoms of AFM?

Most patients will have sudden onset of limb weakness and loss of muscle tone and reflexes. Some patients may also experience

- facial droop/weakness,
- difficulty moving the eyes,
- drooping eyelids, or
- difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech.

Rare symptoms include numbness or tingling in the limbs and being unable to pass urine. In rare cases, a patient may have difficulty breathing due to muscle weakness and require urgent ventilator support.

If you or your child develops any of these symptoms, you should seek medical care right away.

How is AFM diagnosed?

A doctor can tell the difference between AFM and other diseases with a careful examination of the nervous system and the spinal cord, looking at the location of the weakness, muscle tone, and reflexes. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), lab testing of the cerebrospinal fluid, and checking nerve conduction and response can be very helpful in diagnosing cases of AFM.

What causes AFM?

AFM can be caused by a variety of germs, including several viruses:

- enteroviruses (polio and non-polio),
- West Nile virus (WNV) and viruses in the same family as WNV, specifically Japanese encephalitis virus and Saint Louis encephalitis virus, and
- adenoviruses.

Environmental toxins and genetic disorders may also cause AFM. AFM is only one of a number of conditions that can result in neurologic illness with limb weakness. Oftentimes, however, a cause for AFM cannot be identified.

How is AFM treated?

There is no specific treatment for AFM, but a doctor who specializes in treating brain and spinal cord illnesses (neurologist) may recommend certain interventions on a case-by-case basis.

How can I prevent AFM?

Being up to date on all recommended vaccinations, including poliovirus, is one way to protect yourself and your family from diseases that can cause AFM. Check with your doctor to make sure your family is up to date on all recommended vaccines.

You can protect yourself from mosquito-borne viruses such as West Nile virus—another known cause of AFM— by using mosquito repellent and staying indoors at dusk and dawn, which is the prime period that mosquitoes bite. Remove standing or stagnant water from nearby property to minimize the number of mosquitoes.

While we don't know if it is effective in preventing AFM, you can—

- wash your hands often with soap and water,
- avoid close contact with sick people, and
- clean surfaces with a disinfectant, especially surfaces that a sick person has touched.

Washing your hands the right way is one of the best things you and your children can do to protect against getting sick. Wash your hands often, and especially—

- before you touch food;
- after going to the bathroom, blowing your nose, changing a baby's diaper, or touching an animal, an animal's food, urine or feces; and
- before and after taking care of a sick person or a cut or wound.

For more information on acute flaccid myelitis, visit www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis.