

Encephalitis Fact Sheet

Encephalitis is a serious infection of the brain in which the brain cells become inflamed. Although it is not common in this country, about 250 Californians acquire the disease each year. About one quarter of these cases is fatal.

- CAUSATIVE AGENT:** Viral infection, including herpes simplex, mumps, measles, chicken pox, infectious mononucleosis, influenza, rubella and others. In a few people these viruses may travel to the brain and cause encephalitis.
- SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:** An important warning symptom of encephalitis is severe headache. Encephalitis should be suspected if the headache is accompanied by or is soon followed by fever, drowsiness, change in personality or seizures. The severity of the symptoms varies greatly. The more severe cases will affect brain function. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment are crucial to help minimize brain damage.
- PREVENTION:** Prevention plays an important role in avoiding this disease. For example, mosquito bites can transmit arbovirus infections, which, in turn, can result in arbovirus encephalitis. Although mosquito abatement is the responsibility of the health department, individual citizens can help by eliminating the breeding places of mosquito larvae.
- Preventing measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox by vaccination will also help prevent encephalitis.

For more information contact your health care provider, your School Nurse, the Marin County Health Department or <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/arbo>