

JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS VACCINE INFORMATION SHEET

Main points

- The Japanese encephalitis (JE) vaccine protects Japanese encephalitis.
- JE is a viral infection and is acquired through the bite of an infected mosquito.
- The risk of JE is limited to certain geographical areas in Australia and is increased for residents and long-stay travellers especially those with extensive unprotected outdoor, evening/nighttime exposures and during the wetter months.
- Symptoms include sudden high fever, nausea, headache, and altered mental status.
- Consequences of infection may include convulsions, muscular paralysis, difficulty breathing, coma, and death.
- Prevention includes wearing long sleeves and long pants and observing personal protective measures effective against mosquito bites.
- Common side effects of the vaccine include mild pain at the injection site, headache and fatigue.

What is Japanese encephalitis?

Japanese encephalitis (JE) is a rare but serious infection of the brain caused by the Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV). JEV can be spread to humans by some types of mosquitoes. A mosquito can become infected by biting infected animals such as pigs or waterbirds, and can then pass on the infection by biting a human. Humans are not able to transmit JEV to another human or mosquito. Humans cannot get JEV by touching or eating meat from an infected animal.

Most people who get JEV will show no symptoms. A small proportion (less than 10%) of people may experience fever, headache or vomiting. People with severe infection may develop encephalitis: neck stiffness, coma, seizures, disorientation and, potentially, permanent neurological complications or death. Less than 1 in 200 people who get infected with JEV will develop encephalitis.

Death occurs in about 20% to 30% of symptomatic cases. Infected children (younger than 10 years) have a greater risk of severe disease and death. Among survivors, 30% to 50% have serious neurological, cognitive, or psychiatric symptoms even years later.

Who should get the JE vaccine?

People aged 2 months and older who reside in high-risk geographical areas in Australia. Other people who work with pigs and mosquitoes are also recommended to get the JE vaccine. High risk areas are determined by state or territory governments and change over time.

What are the benefits of getting the JE vaccine?

The JE vaccine is the best way to protect against Japanese encephalitis, which is a serious and sometimes fatal disease.

Mosquitoes that transmit JEV are generally night biters but have peak biting activity at dusk and again at dawn. Regardless of vaccination status, you should be especially vigilant in applying repellent during peak biting activity times.

Which JE vaccine can I receive?

Imojev is available for people who are aged 9 months and older. Pregnant women and immunocompromised people cannot receive Imojev as it is a live attenuated vaccine. Women should avoid pregnancy for 28 days after vaccination with Imojev.

JESpect is available for people who are aged 2 months and older. It is recommended for pregnant women, immunocompromised people and children aged 2 months to less than 9 months, as they cannot receive Imojev.

If you are receiving JESpect, you must receive two doses of JESpect at least one month apart to be protected from JE.

Boosters are not recommended for adults receiving Imojev. Boosters are recommended for people who receive JESpect and for children who receive Imojev

Can pregnant women receive the JE vaccine?

Yes, pregnant women can receive 2 doses of the JESpect vaccine. Pregnant women cannot receive the Imojev vaccine as it is a live attenuated vaccine and these vaccines are generally contraindicated in pregnant women. Women should avoid pregnancy for 28 days after vaccination with Imojev.

Women who are breastfeeding are recommended to receive JESpect, however Imojev can be given.

What are possible reactions after the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get JE.

The most common side effects of JE vaccine are injection-site reactions (pain, redness, warmth, and swelling). Fever, irritability, and diarrhea are most common in infants and children younger than 12 years, whereas headaches and muscle aches are most common in adults 18 years and older. Allergic reactions (both immediate and delayed) to the vaccine have occurred.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 000. This reaction can be treated, and it occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to VaxWorks Health Services on 1300 34 84 22 or to your GP.

Who should not get the JE vaccine?

Speak with clinic staff if you are pregnant or if you or your child has an acute febrile illness or has had:

- a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of JE vaccine, or any component of the vaccine;
- an immune system weakened by disease, a genetic disorder or medical treatment;
- a blood transfusion or received other blood products within the past 12 months.

However, if you have concerns, speak with the clinic staff.