

What is Western Equine Encephalitis?

Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE) is a mosquito-borne viral disease. WEE is a member of the family *Togaviridae*, genus *Alphavirus*. WEE occurs in the western parts of the United States, including Iowa and Canada. The word Equine means "horse".

How is WEE transmitted?

WEE virus is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes acquire the virus from infected birds and can spread this to people and horses.

What are the signs and symptoms of WEE?

Most infections do not have any symptoms or may present as mild, nonspecific illness. For those that develop illness, there is usually a sudden onset of symptoms with fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite and extreme tiredness. This can also be followed by confusion, weakness and signs and symptoms of encephalitis. Symptoms can range from mild flu-like illness to severe encephalitis, coma and death. Serious illness is most common in young children. WEE causes "sleeping sickness" in horses especially in young horses.

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

Symptoms usually occur between 5 – 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

How can WEE be prevented?

Avoiding the bite of mosquitoes is the best way to prevent infection with WEE, West Nile virus and other illnesses carried by mosquitoes. Remove standing water from your property. Emptying unused buckets, covering stored tires, and replacing the water in birdbaths weekly are all effective ways to reduce mosquito-breeding pools. Wear lightweight long sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors to reduce the amount of exposed skin. Use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) according to the directions on exposed skin and clothing. A vaccine is available for horses but not humans.