



# Encephalitis

## What is encephalitis?

Encephalitis is an acute infection and inflammation of the brain that can be caused by a variety of viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa.

Encephalitis is a rare condition. It occurs most often in the first year of life, however, the very young and the elderly are more susceptible to a severe case. One of the most common causes of severe encephalitis is the herpes simplex virus which can occur in all ages, including newborns.

## What are the symptoms of encephalitis?

Some people may have symptoms of a cold or stomach infection before encephalitis symptoms begin or appear. Symptoms may vary from mild to severe. Symptoms may include:

- mild headache
- low energy
- poor appetite
- clumsiness
- confusion
- drowsiness
- irritability
- stiff neck and back
- vomiting
- light sensitivity
- fever

Severe symptoms may include loss of consciousness, muscle weakness or paralysis, seizures to severe headache.

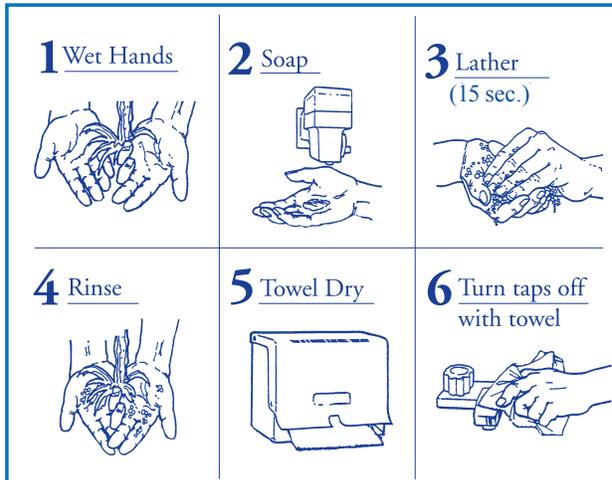
For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

## How does encephalitis spread?

Encephalitis caused by viruses or bacteria are spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions such as saliva, sputum or nasal secretions. This usually happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something they have handled and then rubbing their nose, mouth or eyes. Encephalitis caused by enteroviruses can spread through fecal contamination (such as by someone who uses the toilet or changes a baby's diaper and does not wash their hands well afterward.) Encephalitis caused by arboviruses can spread by infected mosquitoes or ticks.

## How can encephalitis be prevented?

- Hand washing is the most effective method of prevention. Wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds using the 6-step method.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Properly dispose of dirty tissues.
- Do **not** share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys, or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- There is no immunization to prevent encephalitis, however routine immunization is still recommended.
- If you are ill, stay at home.
- Use personal protective measures to avoid insect bites including repellents, protective clothing and stay inside during hours of biting.



## How is encephalitis treated?

Treatment for encephalitis depends on the cause of the infection. It is important to diagnose the patient as soon as possible so they may receive the right medication to treat the symptoms. Supportive measures includes bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids and over-the-counter medication to treat a fever or headache. Most people will recover completely on their own without complications within a few days to a week.

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