

Encephalitis: it's a no brainer

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Encephalitis is a form of acute brain inflammation usually developed due to viral infections. In 1933, a major outbreak of Eastern equine encephalitis occurred along the East coast, giving this form of encephalitis its name.

In 1938, the first human case of encephalitis was reported. Encephalitis has many different forms including Eastern equine encephalitis, Western equine encephalitis, St. Louis encephalitis, and La Crosse encephalitis. All types of encephalitis received names due to the location of major outbreaks. For example, St. Louis and La Crosse encephalitis were named because the first major outbreaks were reported in St.

Louis, Missouri, and La Crosse, Wisconsin. Now, the disease can be seen primarily in North, South, and Central America, as well as other areas in the world. In 2015, it was estimated around 4.3 billion people were diagnosed with encephalitis resulting in 150,000 deaths. In order to fully understand encephalitis, one must look at the causes, symptoms, and treatment of the disease. The first step in understanding encephalitis is knowing the causes.

Encephalitis is most commonly caused through viruses. Encephalitis can be caused by more than a dozen different viruses. These include Exposure may occur by breathing droplets of an infected person, consuming contaminated food or drink, mosquito bites, or skin contact (Kaneshiro 1). It can be caused by the herpes simplex virus, but that normally leads to a more severe case of encephalitis (Kaneshiro 1). Encephalitis caused by herpes simplex is very deadly due to its high mortality rate.

Most patients who died due to encephalitis usually developed it because of the herpes simplex virus (Robinson 2). Overall, developing encephalitis

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through the herpes simplex virus, while uncommon is very severe: “Encephalitis due to infections by the herpes simplex virus causes only about 10% of all cases of the disease. Over half of these cases result in death” (“Encephalitis” 286). Encephalitis can also be caused by mosquito borne viruses. Forms of mosquito borne encephalitis include Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Western Equine Encephalitis, St. Louis encephalitis, Lacrosse encephalitis, and West Nile Encephalitis (Lew 22).

The most severe mosquito borne encephalitis is eastern equine encephalitis. While being the most serious, it is the most rare, with only about five cases in the United States per year (Lew 22). Mosquito borne types of encephalitis are seen around the world: “Mosquito borne forms of encephalitis are present in North and South America, Europe, Russia, Asia, India, northern Africa, and even Australia”(“Encephalitis” 286). In addition to learning about the causes of encephalitis, one should also learn to recognize the symptoms of the disease. There are many symptoms associated with encephalitis ranging from very serious to very common.

Symptoms of encephalitis typically begin five to ten days after the infection: “In secondary encephalitis, symptoms usually begin 5-10 days after the onset of the disease itself and are related to the breakdown of the insulating myelin sheath that covers nerve fibers” (Robinson 2). In some cases people are not even aware they are infected because they do not show symptoms (Robinson 2). Mild symptoms include low fever, mild headache, low energy, poor appetite, clumsiness, confusion, and drowsiness. People who just experience mild symptoms do not even know they are infected because of common effects like headaches. Due to this, you must go to a doctor for a <https://assignbuster.com/encephalitis-its-a-no-brainer/>

definite diagnosis (Robinson 3). Even if symptoms start out mild they can change to severe within the course of hours or days.

The most severe symptoms include muscle weakness, paralysis, seizures, severe headaches, a sudden change in mental state, and decreased consciousness. Decreased consciousness can mean anything from poor responsiveness to comas. Examples of sudden change in mood include flat mood, impaired judgment, lack of daily interests, and things similar to this behavior (Robinson 2). Symptoms can appear quickly or not at all, and severe symptoms can be deadly: “ Headache, fever, nausea, and disorientation – begin within two weeks. Paralysis and coma also can occur. About 50% of those who contract Powassan encephalitis will have permanent brain damage and more than 15% of those who become infected die of infection” (“ Encephalitis” 286).

Vomiting and visual disturbances are symptoms of mild and severe cases. Due to this, if anyone shows these symptoms he/she should seek medical attention (“ Encephalitis” 286). Treatments for encephalitis vary depending on the type and the severity: “ The goals of treatment are to provide supportive care (rest, nutrition, fluids) to help the body fight the infection, and to relieve symptoms” (Kaneshiro 3). Bacterial encephalitis usually is treated by antibiotics and bedrest. The goal is to be as comfortable as possible during this time so staying well rested is important.

Viral encephalitis is treated with antiviral medicines including acyclovir, ganciclovir, foscarnet, ribavirin, and azidothymidine. Acyclovir is usually the most used and the most successful of the antiviral drugs (Robinson 3). In the

less common severe cases, many precautions are taken to ensure proper treatment: “ In more severe cases, hospitalization may be necessary, and drugs may be given to control or prevent seizures. The swelling of the meninges can be reduced using corticosteroids” (“ Encephalitis” 288). When brain swelling occurs corticosteroids are prescribed. The two main corticosteroids usually used are prednisone and dexamethasone.

If the person experiences seizures then anticonvulsant drugs will be used to control and prevent seizures. Some anticonvulsant drugs that are used are dilantin and dehyton (Robinson 3). To be fully educated about the illness encephalitis, one should be familiar with the causes, symptoms, and treatments. First, encephalitis is caused by more than a dozen types of viruses, and it can be caused through mosquito bites. A person can become infected through breathing droplets of an infected person, consuming contaminated food or drink, or sustaining skin contact with a patient of encephalitis. Furthermore, the symptoms of encephalitis vary depending on the severity of the disease.

Patients usually experience symptoms, if any, in the first five to ten days. These symptoms are usually either mild symptoms or none at all. In some cases, encephalitis can become severe, and patients may develop emergency symptoms. If these symptoms occur, the person should seek medical attention immediately. Lastly, there are many treatments for encephalitis, and the type usually varies. If it is bacterial encephalitis, then antibiotics are usually prescribed while for viral encephalitis, antiviral medicines are given.

Also, if a patient experiences brain swelling or seizures, then corticosteroids or anticonvulsant drugs are prescribed to control these symptoms. It is important that the world raise awareness for major diseases such as encephalitis because they are impacting people around the world and will continue affecting people until a sufficient cure is found.