

Acute Flaccid Myelitis Fact Sheet

Acute Flaccid Myelitis, or AFM, is a rare, but serious condition that affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord, which can result from a variety of causes. Practicing good hygiene is one way to protect yourself and family from diseases that can cause AFM.

What are the symptoms of AFM?



Sudden limb weakness and loss of muscle tone



Facial droop or weakness



Difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech



Difficulty moving the eyes or drooping eyelids

What causes AFM?

AFM can be caused by a variety of germs, including several viruses:

- enteroviruses (polio and non-polio),
- West Nile virus (WNV) and viruses in the same family as WNV, specifically Japanese encephalitis virus and Saint Louis encephalitis virus,
- herpesviruses, such as cytomegalovirus and Epstein-Barr virus, and
- adenoviruses.

How is AFM diagnosed?

AFM is diagnosed by examining a patient's nervous system in combination with reviewing pictures of the spinal cord. A doctor can examine a patient's nervous system and location of weakness, poor muscle tone, and decreased reflexes. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be helpful in diagnosing cases of AFM.

To report a suspected case of AFM, complete a REPORT Card online at <http://alabamapublichealth.gov/infectiousdiseases/report.html>.

How is AFM treated?

There is no specific treatment for AFM, but a doctor who specializes in treating brain and spinal cord illnesses (neurologist) may recommend certain interventions on a case-by-case basis. For example, physical or occupational therapy may be recommended to help with limb weakness caused by AFM.

How can I prevent AFM?

Being up to date on all recommended vaccinations is one way to protect yourself and your family from diseases that can cause AFM.

Poliovirus and West Nile virus may sometimes lead to AFM. To protect against these—

- make sure you and your children are vaccinated against polio, and
- protect against bites from mosquitoes, which can carry West Nile virus, by using mosquito repellent, staying indoors at dusk and dawn (when bites are more common), and removing standing or stagnant water near your home (where mosquitoes can breed).

While we don't know if it is effective in preventing AFM, washing your hands often with soap and water is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to other people. Wash your hands—

- before you touch food,
- after going to the bathroom, blowing your nose, changing a baby's diaper, or touching an animal, an animal's food, urine or feces; and
- before and after taking care of a sick person or a cut or wound.

Take additional steps to protect yourself by—

- avoiding close contact with sick people, and
- cleaning surfaces with a disinfectant, especially surfaces that a sick person has touched.

