

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement On Acute Flaccid Myelitis

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has received recent reports from health care providers of nine sporadic, clinically diagnosed cases of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM). IDPH is working with the health care providers to collect necessary information to send to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC reviews medical information on all reported clinical cases to confirm the diagnosis. The case reports are from individuals younger than 18 years of age and from northern Illinois. Specific location information is not available. The CDC will make the final determination on diagnoses and numbers are subject to change.

In September, IDPH issued an alert to health care providers about AFM, including information about reporting this clinical syndrome and submitting specimens. Illinois has monitored this syndrome since 2014 when it was first described by CDC. Since 2015, four cases reviewed by CDC experts have been counted in Illinois. IDPH continues to work closely with the CDC to monitor reports of AFM.

AFM is a serious, but uncommon condition. It affects a person's nervous system, specifically the spinal cord. AFM or neurologic conditions like it have a variety of causes, including viruses, environmental toxins, and genetic disorders. The viruses can include:

- enteroviruses (polio and non-polio)
- West Nile virus and viruses in the same family
- adenoviruses

Much is still unknown about AFM and often, a cause for AFM cannot be identified. Symptoms can include:

- sudden onset of limb weakness and loss of muscle tone and reflexes
- facial droop/weakness
- difficulty moving the eyes
- drooping eyelids
- difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech

If you or your child develops any of these symptoms, you should seek medical care right away.

There is no specific treatment for AFM, but a doctor who specializes in treating brain and spinal cord illnesses may recommend certain interventions on a case-by-case basis.

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Although we are still learning about AFM and its causes, being up to date on all recommended vaccinations, including poliovirus, is one way to protect yourself and your family from diseases that can cause AFM. You can also protect yourself from mosquito-borne viruses such as West Nile virus—another known cause of AFM.

While we don't know if it is effective in preventing AFM, steps you can take to help stay healthy include:

- washing your hands often with soap and water
- avoiding close contact with sick people
- cleaning surfaces with a disinfectant, especially surfaces that a sick person has touched

For more information on acute flaccid myelitis, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/>.

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