

Common Questions About Powassan

Q. What is Powassan Encephalitis?

A. Powassan encephalitis is a serious and rare tick-borne illness caused by the Powassan virus. In Maine, the Powassan virus is spread by the woodchuck tick.

Q. Who gets Powassan encephalitis?

A. Anyone can get infected with the Powassan virus. The majority of cases occur in adults who spend time outdoors in areas where ticks are common during the months of April through October.

Q. How is Powassan spread?

A. Powassan is spread by the bite of a tick that already has the germ. Powassan does not spread from person to person.

Q. What are the signs of Powassan infection?

A. Early signs of Powassan usually include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, and sleepiness. In later stages, signs such as respiratory distress, tremors, confusion, seizures, coma, paralysis, and sometimes even death can occur.

Q. When do the signs of Powassan first appear?

A. Signs generally are seen about 4-18 days after the tick bite.

Q. What are the treatment methods?

A. There is currently no effective treatment for Powassan. If you have Powassan, your doctor will have you kept at the hospital so that you can receive supportive care.

Q. How do I protect myself from getting Powassan?

A. To prevent Powassan and other tick-borne illnesses, the best protection is to avoid contact with ticks. If you are working, playing, or relaxing in areas that may have ticks you should do the following:

- Wear light colored clothing (spot ticks easier) with long sleeve shirts and pants
- Create an extra "no tick" zone by tucking your pants into your socks and you shirt into your pants
- Use insect repellent (with DEET) on your skin and apply permethrin (kills ticks on contact) to your clothes. For information on other recommended

repellents, click on the following link:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/RepellentUpdates.htm>

- Check your clothing and skin carefully after being outdoors in likely tick infested areas & remove ticks promptly
- Wash area of any possible tick bites thoroughly with soap and water, apply an antiseptic to area of the bite
- Mark on a calendar the date that you were bitten, then watch yourself for signs of Powassan or any changes in your personal health every day for the next two months
- Keep your lawn mowed, cut overgrown brush, and clear away leaf litter from your home
- Inspect any pets daily and remove any ticks found

Q. How do I properly remove a tick?

A. Using tweezers, you should grab the tick at its mouth and using firm steady pressure you should pull the tick out. Do not yank or squish the tick because it may have harmful bodily fluids. Also, do not use petroleum jelly, hot matches, nail polish remover or any other substance to remove the tick. Using those items could increase the risk of an infection.

Q. How do I obtain information on tick identification?

A. You can have a tick identified by sending it to the Maine Medical Center Lyme Research Lab. For specific instructions on how to submit a tick please go to the Maine Medical Center Lyme Research Lab website at:
www.mmcri.org/lyme/submit.html