



Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM)

What is acute flaccid myelitis (AFM)?

Acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) is a rare condition that affects the nervous system, which can cause muscles and reflexes in the body to not work normally.

What are the symptoms of acute flaccid myelitis?

Symptoms of AFM include limb weakness, facial droop/weakness, difficulty moving the eyes, drooping eyelids, difficulty swallowing, or slurred speech. There have also been reports of pain in the arms and legs, and the inability to pass urine. The most severe symptom of AFM is respiratory failure that occurs because the muscles involved in breathing are no longer able to expand or contract due to weakening, which can require the use of breathing machines (ventilator support).

What causes acute flaccid myelitis?

AFM can be caused by a variety of viruses, including poliovirus and other non-polio enteroviruses, West Nile virus (WNV) and viruses in the same family as WNV, and adenoviruses. Other causes of this condition include genetic disorders, autoimmune diseases and exposure to environmental toxins.

How is acute flaccid myelitis diagnosed?

A doctor will be able to tell the difference between AFM and other conditions with similar symptoms with a careful examination of the nervous system, looking at the location of muscle weakness, muscle tone, reflexes, and running certain tests such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). A doctor may collect specimens, such as cerebrospinal fluid, to test for specific viruses that are associated with AFM.

How is acute flaccid myelitis treated?

Currently, there is no specific treatment for AFM due to the multiple causes of this condition, other than what doctors call supportive care, or managing the symptoms. A doctor that specializes in treating brain and spinal cord conditions (neurologist) may recommend certain therapies on a case-by-case basis.

How is acute flaccid myelitis spread?

It depends on the type of virus that is causing the symptoms.

- Enteroviruses, are typically spread from person-to-person via the fecal-oral route.
- Adenoviruses, are spread through close contact by coughing, sneezing, or touching objects when the germs are on your hands, which are then picked up by others and deposited on their mouth, noses or eyes before washing their hands.
- Mosquitoborne viruses, such as West Nile, are spread by mosquito bites and are not contagious between people.

How can you prevent acute flaccid myelitis?

Make sure you and your family are up to date on polio vaccinations.

You can protect yourself and others from enteroviruses and adenoviruses by the following a few easy steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Protect yourself from mosquitoborne viruses by using mosquito repellent and staying indoors when mosquitoes are active. Remove standing or stagnant water from nearby property to minimize the number of mosquitoes.