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Community and Health Services Department



Yellow Fever & Yellow Fever Vaccine

What is yellow fever?

Yellow fever is an acute viral disease of short duration and that can be mild to severe. This virus is commonly found in sub-Saharan Africa and tropical South America. In areas where the disease is common, the case fatality rate for local residents is approximately five percent. For visitors to these regions, or during epidemics, the fatality rate can be as high as 20 to 50 percent.

What are the symptoms of yellow fever?

Symptoms occur suddenly, usually about three to six days after exposure to the virus. The disease occurs in two phases.

- The first acute phase is normally characterized by fever, muscle pain, headache, shivers, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. After three to four days most patients improve and their symptoms disappear.
- Fifteen percent of people who get yellow fever will enter a “toxic phase” within 24 hours. Fever reappears and several body systems are affected. The patient rapidly develops jaundice and complains of abdominal pain with vomiting. Bleeding from the mouth, nose, eyes or stomach can occur and kidney function can worsen.

How does yellow fever spread?

The virus is spread through the bite of mosquitoes infected with the yellow fever virus. Humans and monkeys are most likely to be infected. Blood of persons is infective for mosquitoes shortly before the fever begins and for the first three to five days of illness; however, the virus has been found in the blood up to 17 days after the illness began.

How can yellow fever be prevented?

1. Getting vaccinated against yellow fever is the most effective way to prevent this disease. People living in or travelling to areas where yellow fever is common should receive the vaccine, which:

- is highly effective
- provides immunity within ten days in more than 90 percent of people
- provides protection for at least 30 to 35 years, probably much longer, although booster doses may be needed within 10 years

The yellow fever vaccine very rarely causes serious side effects, but should not be given to anyone with an allergy to eggs.

Note: The vaccine must be administered at a licensed travel clinic. To find the clinic nearest you, please call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 (TTY 1-866-252-9933)

2. Protect yourself from mosquito bites:

- Stay in air-conditioned or well-screened quarters
- Avoid being outdoors when mosquito activity is highest (early morning and late afternoon hours)
- Travellers to rural areas should sleep under mosquito netting
- Wear clothing that reduces the amount of exposed skin (long pants, long-sleeved shirts)
- Apply an insect repellent containing DEET sparingly to exposed skin

Note: Do not use insect repellents containing more than 30% DEET on children.

What is the treatment for yellow fever?

Treatment for yellow fever consists of providing general supportive care. Other treatments depend upon which organ systems are involved. No effective specific antiviral therapy has been identified.

For further information, please call:

York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca