

Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM)- Factsheet

What is AFM?

Acute Flaccid Myelitis, or AFM, is a very rare but serious neurological condition affecting the nerves in the spinal cord that control the muscles. The affected muscle(s) suddenly become weak and limp. AFM can happen a couple weeks after a person has been sick with some other viral illness, but there is not always a known cause, and it is not known why only some people get AFM.

What are the symptoms of AFM?

The most common symptoms of AFM are the sudden onset of arm or leg weakness (especially the upper arm or upper leg, such as difficulty lifting the arm(s) above the head or lifting the knee(s) to hip level) and loss of muscle tone and reflexes. Some people also have difficulty moving their eyes or have drooping eyelids; have a droop in their face or facial weakness; or have difficulty swallowing or slurred speech. Some people also feel pain, numbness, or tingling in the affected limb(s). If you or your child have any of these symptoms, seek medical care right away.

Is AFM contagious?

No. Some of the possible triggers for AFM include viruses that are contagious, but AFM itself is not contagious.

Who gets AFM?

Most cases of AFM occur in school-aged children, but sometimes infants or adults can get it.

What treatment is available for people with AFM?

There is not currently a specific treatment for AFM, but many people with AFM will have physical therapy and occupational therapy to try to help strengthen their weakened limb(s).

How can I protect myself and my family from getting AFM?

While there are some viruses that have been associated with AFM more often than others, many of these are relatively common, and scientists are still learning why only some people later develop AFM. So, although we don't know yet how to prevent AFM, some of those common viruses can be prevented by:

- Staying up-to-date on recommended vaccines
- Using an effective insect repellent to prevent mosquito and tick bites
- Washing hands with soap and water before eating or touching your face, and after using the bathroom