

JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS - UPDATE

Information for NSW General Practitioners

Please distribute this information to all staff



Health

Key points for GPs:

1. Japanese encephalitis, a mosquito-borne viral illness, has been detected in NSW.
2. Vaccination is recommended for “priority vaccination groups”*. Limited doses of vaccine can be ordered through the State Vaccine Centre for patients in these targeted groups.
3. Consider the diagnosis of Japanese Encephalitis in patients presenting with fever, headache and signs of encephalitis.
4. Encourage all your patients to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

*Recommended priority vaccination groups include:

- people who work at, reside at, or have a planned non-deferable visit to a:
 - piggery, including but not limited to farm workers and their families (including children aged 2 months and older) living at the piggery, pig transport workers, veterinarians (including veterinary students and nurses) and others involved in the care of pigs.
 - pork abattoir or pork rendering plant.
- personnel who work directly with mosquitoes through their surveillance (field or laboratory based) or control and management, and indirectly through management of vertebrate mosquito-borne disease surveillance systems (e.g. sentinel animals) such as:
 - environmental health officers and workers (urban and remote)
 - entomologists
- all diagnostic and research laboratory workers who may be exposed to the virus, such as persons working with JEV cultures or mosquitoes with the potential to transmit JEV; as per the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

At this time, it is not recommended that NSW GPs consider JE vaccination for other groups in the community. Mosquito bite avoidance should be encouraged.

Situation update

Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) is transmitted to humans and other animals by the bite of infected mosquitoes. Cases of JE have been confirmed in NSW. All are residents of regional NSW and most have exposures in the Murrumbidgee LHD or the southern part of Far West NSW. The extent of the risk to humans remains undefined and the potential for exposure elsewhere remains possible.

Patient investigation

- Symptoms of JE include fever and headache, variably accompanied by neck stiffness, disorientation, tremors, coma, convulsions & paralysis. If patients present with symptoms of encephalitis, include JE in your differential diagnosis if they live or have visited rural areas, especially if they were near pig farms or report being bitten by mosquitos.
- Refer patients with suspected JE to hospital for management and further investigation (as per alert 002/22 issued through the NSW Health Safety Alert Broadcast System).

How to order vaccine

- For patients who meet one of the above priority groups, order Imojev as per usual arrangements through the State Vaccine Centre (<https://nsw.tollhealthcare.com/>). Orders are limited to ten (10) doses per practice.
- Practices that require more than 10 doses of JEspect (for immunocompromised people, breastfeeding women or very young children) need to arrange a special order (supply dependent) by contacting the local public health unit on 1300 066 055.
- Patients in recommended priority vaccination groups should not be charged for Government-funded JE vaccine.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook provides guidance on dosage, administration, contraindications and precautions (<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au>). Imojev is given by subcutaneous injection.