

Japanese encephalitis is a viral infection that can cause inflammation of the brain. Symptoms usually begin with a sudden onset of fever, headache, vomiting and neck stiffness which may last for several days; this may progress to mild confusion, agitation and coma. Of those who do develop symptoms of the disease (approximately 1 in 250 infections become clinically apparent) approximately one third will recover, one third will sustain permanent neurological damage, and one third will die. Fortunately this disease is rare in travellers.

How do you catch Japanese encephalitis?

Japanese encephalitis is found throughout most of Asia and parts of the western Pacific. Disease transmission is mainly confined to rural agricultural areas as the virus mainly affects pigs and wading birds. It is spread by mosquitoes that bite between dusk and dawn. Cases usually occur seasonally during and just after the monsoon; in the tropics and subtropics, disease transmission can occur throughout the year, intensifying during the rainy season

Incubation period

5 -15 days.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be confirmed by special blood tests.

Prevention

Those visiting regions where Japanese encephalitis is present are advised to take steps to avoid mosquito bites. The risk for short-term travellers visiting urban areas is very low. An effective vaccine is available and should be considered by travellers staying for a month or longer in rural endemic regions during the main transmission season or those with shorter itineraries whose planned activities will increase their risk of exposure. High risk activities include camping, cycling and field work especially if spending time in rice fields (where mosquitoes breed) or staying close to pig farms.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for Japanese encephalitis. Treatment is supportive, to relieve symptoms and manage disease complications.



This information is produced by MASTA as a general guide to be used in conjunction with advice from your doctor or nurse. To obtain a health brief tailored to your journey visit a MASTA associated travel clinic or www.masta-travel-health.com