

Japanese Encephalitis vaccine recommendations

Information for NSW General Practitioners

Please distribute this information to all staff

Key points:

1. Be alert to the risk of Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV), particularly in regional NSW where mosquitos are present
2. Offer vaccination to patients at higher risk of JEV disease. In addition to existing recommendations, this now includes people aged 50 years and over who spend on average at least 4 hours per day outdoors, in 14 local government areas in NSW
3. Order vaccine through the State Vaccine Centre for eligible patients (limited quantities)
4. Advise patients on the importance of regular and routine mosquito bite prevention to avoid other serious diseases, including Murray Valley Encephalitis.

Japanese Encephalitis vaccine is now recommended for a wider number of people:

New eligible cohort for free JE vaccine

People who

- are aged 50 years or over **AND**
- spend significant time each day outdoors (4 hours or more) **AND**
- live or work in the following local government areas (LGAs) in NSW:

○ Albury	○ Goulburn Mulwaree
○ Balranald	○ Greater Hume
○ Berrigan	○ Griffith
○ Carrathool	○ Lockhart
○ Dubbo Regional	○ Murray River
○ Edward River	○ Temora
○ Federation	○ Wentworth

Other existing cohorts eligible for free JE vaccine

- People who work at, reside at, or have a planned non-deferable visit to a **piggery**, including **farm workers** and their **families** (including children aged 2 months and older) living at the piggery, **pig transport workers**, **veterinarians** (including students and nurses) and others involved in the care of pigs; and **pork abattoir** or **pork rendering plant**.
- People 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) and entomologists
- **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.

Situation update

A serosurvey was conducted in 5 towns in western and southern NSW that had evidence of JEV-infected mosquitoes. The serosurvey found that in these towns exposed to JEV, about 1 in 11 people (8.7%) had evidence of JEV infection. Please strongly encourage your patients to avoid mosquito bites.

How to order vaccine:

- Orders can be made through: <https://nsw.tollhealthcare.com/>
- Practices that require more than 20 doses of Imojev, or more than 5 doses of JEspect (for immunocompromised people, pregnant people 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.

At this time, JE is not recommended for other groups, apart from those in the Australian Immunisation Handbook. The Australian Immunisation Handbook provides guidance on dosage, administration, contraindications, and precautions (<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au>).

Background

Between January-March 2022, 13 people acquired JE infection in NSW, and most presented with severe disease. 2 people died. This was the first ever local transmission of JEV in NSW.

Japanese encephalitis virus is transmitted to humans and other animals by the bite of infected mosquitoes. Most cases are asymptomatic, but 1 in 250 will develop a severe infection, and about 20-30% of severe infections are fatal.

Find out more: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/jevirus>

Issued by: Executive Director, Health Protection
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