



Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM) Questions & Answers

What is AFM?

Acute flaccid myelitis (AFM) is a rare but serious condition affecting the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord, causing weakness in one or more limbs.

What are the symptoms of AFM?

AFM causes arm and/or leg weakness. Additional symptoms of AFM can include:

- facial droop/weakness
- difficulty moving the eyes
- drooping eyelids
- difficulty with swallowing or slurred speech

Rarely, symptoms of AFM can include numbness or tingling in limbs, and difficulty passing urine. Some patients might have difficulty breathing due to muscle weakness and need ventilator support.

What causes AFM?

There is no known single cause of AFM. The condition can be caused by a variety of germs (including viruses), environmental factors and genetics. Sometimes, the cause of a patient's AFM may not be identified.

Who gets AFM?

AFM is not a new condition, but increases in reports of AFM have been seen in the U.S. since 2014. AFM is rare, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that less than one in a million people in the U.S. will get AFM each year. Most reported cases in the U.S. have been in children, but people of any age can get AFM.

How is AFM diagnosed?

Tests a doctor might do if they suspect AFM include examining a case's nervous system, taking a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan, and testing the cerebral spinal fluid. It is important that tests are done as soon as possible after someone develops symptoms.

How is AFM treated?

There are no specific treatment recommendations for people diagnosed with AFM. Cases might be referred to neurologists, or doctors who specialize in treating diseases affecting the brain or spinal cord, for care.

How is AFM prevented?

There is no single, specific cause of AFM. However, since AFM can develop as a result of a viral infection, DPH recommends parents and children take basic steps to avoid infections and stay healthy.

- Wash your hands frequently to limit your exposure to germs
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Stay home if you are sick
- Stay up-to-date on vaccinations
- Protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites if you are spending time outside.

What should I do if I think my child has AFM?

If you see potential symptoms of AFM in your child, (for example, if he or she is not using an arm) you should contact your health care provider as soon as possible. AFM can be diagnosed by examining your child's nervous system, taking an MRI scan and testing the cerebral spinal fluid. It is important that tests are done as soon as possible after someone develops symptoms. While there is no specific treatment for AFM, doctors may recommend certain interventions on a case-by-case basis.

What is the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) doing about AFM?

DPH, in collaboration with local and district public health offices, has been working closely with health care providers to gather information about suspect cases to better understand who gets AFM, why these cases are occurring, and prevention measures. DPH is also in contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to share information.

Where can I learn more about AFM?

- Visit the Georgia Department of Public Health's website for more information on AFM in Georgia: <https://dph.georgia.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis>
- Visit the CDC's website for more information on AFM in the U.S.: <https://www.cdc.gov/acute-flaccid-myelitis/index.html>