

Update on Japanese Encephalitis Virus (JEV) advice for summer and expanded vaccine eligibility criteria

Key Points

- **Be aware of JEV symptoms in patients during the warmer months.**
- **JEV is a notifiable condition in the ACT – call CDC on 5124 9213 at diagnosis or if there is reasonable clinical suspicion.**
- **Vaccine eligibility criteria have been expanded to include ACT residents who are engaged in flood relief activities in JEV-affected local government areas in NSW or Victoria.**
- **Please advise your patients on the importance of routine mosquito bite prevention during the summer.**

Dear Colleagues,

Earlier this year, ACT Health wrote to General Practitioners about Japanese Encephalitis virus (JEV), including which specific groups could access government-funded vaccine in the ACT. I am writing to provide an update on advice heading into summer, including expanded vaccination eligibility criteria in the ACT.

Be aware of JEV symptoms during the warmer months

There have been no confirmed human cases of JEV infection acquired in the ACT to date. However, there is the potential to see transmission in our region over the coming summer months because the mosquito vector implicated in transmission has been detected in our region.

While most infections are minimally symptomatic, some infected people experience fever, headache, arthralgia and rash; more severe infections may manifest as encephalitis with or without meningeal involvement.

Please consider JEV infection in any patients presenting with headache, fever, and signs of encephalitis – they should be referred to hospital for further investigation and management.

JEV infection is a notifiable disease in the ACT and requires immediate telephone notification to Communicable Disease Control (CDC) (by calling 02 5124 9213) at the time of diagnosis or based on reasonable clinical suspicion.

Expanded JEV vaccine priority groups

Government supplies of the JEV vaccine are being prioritised for those identified at highest risk of exposure to JEV.

To align with vaccination programs in NSW and Victoria, and because of the potential risk associated with the current weather and flooding situation, the ACT has expanded vaccine priority criteria to include:

- People who are engaged in the prolonged outdoor recovery efforts (clean up) of stagnant waters following floods (as a volunteer or through work related to flood response efforts) in any of the affected local government areas in NSW or Victoria

Affected LGAs in NSW and Victoria are:

- NSW: Information on 'LGAs of high JEV concern' is available on the NSW government website <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/infectious/jev/pages/vaccination>
- Victoria: Campaspe, Gannawarra, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Loddon, Mildura, Moira, Swan Hill, Wodonga, Towong, Benalla, Wangaratta and Strathbogie. Further information is available on the Victorian Government website [Japanese encephalitis virus \(health.vic.gov.au\)](http://health.vic.gov.au)

The below national priority groups continue to be eligible for government funded JEV vaccine:

- 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, transport workers, veterinarians 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](#).

Please note that these priority groups will be reviewed over time. ACT Health will keep you updated on any changes.

Government funded JEV vaccine stock should not be used for people outside of these priority groups, including for people seeking JEV vaccination prior to domestic or international travel. For these people, and where JEV vaccination is recommended as per the Australian Immunisation Handbook, please use private vaccine stock.



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How to access JEV vaccine

If a patient requests JEV vaccination (regardless of whether or not they have received a letter directly from ACT Health), assess whether the patient is eligible to receive government funded JEV vaccine, as per the information above. If eligible:

- Complete the Order Form for JEV Vaccine (attached and available on the ACT Health JEV webpage: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/jev>) and return it to immunisation@act.gov.au or fax on 5124 9307.
- The Immunisation Unit will organise delivery of the vaccine to your practice within two working days. Delivery will only occur between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays). Please allow for this when booking a follow-up appointment for vaccine administration.
- The vaccine will be in a clear see-through bag and labelled with the patient's name.

Should you have any questions about the ordering or delivery process for JEV vaccine, or the JEV vaccine priority groups please refer to the ACT Health JEV webpage (<https://www.health.act.gov.au/jev>) or contact the Immunisation Unit on 5124 9800.

Mosquito bite prevention

Please advise your patients on the importance of routine mosquito bite prevention during the summer to help prevent Japanese encephalitis and other mosquito-borne diseases, including Murray Valley encephalitis, Kunjin, Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus infections.

This is particularly important for patients:

- Visiting areas where there are significant mosquito populations
- Engaging in outdoor activities (e.g. camping, fishing, hiking) near significant mosquito populations, particularly near waterways

Further information about mosquito bite prevention can be found on the [ACT Health website](#).

Yours sincerely

Dr Kerry Coleman
Chief Health Officer

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