

Japanese Encephalitis

What is Japanese Encephalitis?

Japanese Encephalitis is a viral infection spread by night time biting culex mosquitoes and occurs in many parts of Asia and Oceania.

Disease risks:

In areas where Japanese encephalitis occurs, less than 3% of the mosquitoes may be infected with the virus. Only 1 in 200 persons bitten by an infected mosquito will develop an illness.

The majority of infected persons develop mild symptoms (consisting of a flu-like illness) or no symptoms at all. However, Japanese encephalitis may lead to a serious infection of the brain in less than 1% of those infected (encephalitis).

There is no specific treatment. Encephalitis is fatal in one third of cases, another third survive with paralysis or other forms of brain damage, and the remaining third recover without further problems.

Young children, people over 55 years and pregnant women have a higher risk of developing serious illness if infected.

Recommendations:

Consider the vaccine if you will be:

- Travelling for 30 days or longer in rural endemic areas during the transmission season
- Living long term with prolonged stays in urban settings
- Travelling for less than one month in rural endemic areas, but your planned activities or an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis in the area, put you at particular risk

Vaccination: For those 18 years or older:

Licensed 2 doses (Ixiaro): DAY 0 & 28. A booster maybe considered after 2 years.

For those aged 1 year or older:

Unlicensed 3 doses (Korean green Cross): DAY 0, 7 & 28 to 30. For continued protection a booster is required after 1 year. Thereafter a booster maybe considered after 3 years.

Unlicensed 2 doses (Korean Green Cross): 7 to 14 days apart are recommended in special circumstances only (less than 80% of travellers receiving 2 doses have some protection after 6 months).

Possible side effects with Ixiaro include: headache, muscle aches and flu like symptoms.

Possible side effects with Korean Green Cross vaccine:

- Serious allergic side effects from the vaccine have been reported in less than 1% of people who are vaccinated.
- These side effects can be delayed for several days after vaccination and consist of hives and dangerous swelling of the throat and mouth. These reactions have happened following an uneventful 1st dose.
- Travellers experiencing these side effects should go straight to an A&E department where they can receive emergency treatment.
- People who have multiple allergies, especially to bee stings and various drugs, appear to be at a higher risk for side effects.
- Rarely (less than 1-2 per million people vaccinated) the vaccine may cause brain swelling (encephalitis), confusion and fits

In view of possible side effects we would recommend an interval of 10 days after completion of a course of Korean Green Cross vaccine before departure. No such interval is required with the Ixiaro vaccine.