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US Warns Of Polio-Like Illness Outbreak In Four Months



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WASHINGTON — The national public health agency of the United States, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on Aug. 17 alerted of an expected outbreak of the polio-like disease Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM) in the next four months.

AFM is an uncommon but serious neurologic condition. It causes the muscles and reflexes in the body to become weak.

“Parents and doctors should suspect AFM in patients with sudden limb weakness, especially during August through November,” it said, repeating a **warning** in the agency’s latest “Vital Signs” reports.

“Recent respiratory illness or fever and the presence of neck or back pain or any neurologic symptom should heighten their concern.”

AFM is a medical emergency, and patients should seek immediate medical care, even in areas with high Covid-19 incidence. Because of physical distancing measures to fight the pandemic, 2021’s outbreak could be delayed beyond August, and in a best-case scenario, AFM cases could be fewer than expected, according to the release.

“The neurological disease that causes paralysis has surfaced every two years since 2014, with the largest outbreak in 2018 sickening 238 people in 42 states, nearly 95 percent of them children,” the public health agency said

“Pediatricians and frontline providers in emergency departments and urgent care centers should be prepared to recognize symptoms of AFM and immediately hospitalize patients quickly. Timing is critical at each step — prompt AFM recognition leads to optimal medical management.”

While there is no cure or treatment for the disease, early diagnosis increases the effectiveness of measures to treat symptoms, including physical therapy to help victims regain the use of paralyzed arms and legs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Every two years, AFM manifests itself in the form of sudden weakness in limbs. Most patients also report fever or respiratory infections before latent AFM turns into full-blown outbreaks.

More than a third of these patients could access proper treatment in public health facilities due to delays in recognition. Since its first appearance in 2014, AFM was detected in officially confirmed 106 cases across 29 states in 2018.

Most of the cases in 2014, 2016, and 2018 outbreaks were in children around five-year-old.

With no information on the origins of AFM, experts advise frequent handwashing, decontamination of surfaces, physical distancing, and staying up to speed with immunizations.

In 2018, Robert R. Redfield, the then director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ordered an AFM **Task Force** to assist an investigation into the origin, treatments, and outcomes of the disease.

(With inputs from ANI)

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