



Acute Flaccid Paralysis

What is it?

Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) is an abnormal condition that involves weakness, paralysis, or loss of muscle tone.

What causes it?

There are many different pathogens or conditions that can cause AFP. One of the most common causes of AFP in Canada is Guillain-Barré Syndrome (an immune system disorder).

Why is AFP monitored in Canada?

Polio can cause AFP. Canada has polio-free status, and it is important to maintain this. All cases of AFP are investigated to rule out or detect polio as a cause.

What are the symptoms?

Rapid onset of weakness or paralysis, characterized as flaccid (reduced tone) without other obvious causes (e.g., trauma).

The most common feature of AFP associated with paralytic polio is an asymmetric distribution (not affecting both sides equally), which affects some muscle groups while not others, with a fever present at the beginning. The most common pattern involves one leg only, or one arm; although, this occurs less often. It is less common for both legs or both arms to be affected.

AFP caused by Guillain-Barré Syndrome may present as symmetrical (the same on both sides) paralysis and may get worse for up to 10 days.

How is it spread?

The way it spreads depends on the cause of the AFP.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the cause of the AFP.

How is it prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent AFP. However, there is a vaccine to prevent polio. It is important to stay up to date with your vaccinations.

Other prevention measures depend on the cause of the AFP.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) Program at 705-474-1400 or toll free at 1-800-563-2808, ext. 5229.

References:

Ministry of Health. (2022). Infectious Diseases Protocol, Appendix 1: Acute Flaccid Paralysis. Retrieved from:

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