

# Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) vaccination

Japanese encephalitis is a rare but serious disease caused by the Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV).

Eligible people who live and work in certain areas along the River Murray can receive the JEV vaccine.

Protect yourself and your family against Japanese encephalitis – if you're eligible, get the free vaccine now.

## What is Japanese Encephalitis Virus?

JEV is a mosquito-borne virus that can be transmitted to humans.

While most people infected do not experience any illness, they can experience mild symptoms such as fever and headache.

A small number of people will have encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). This may begin with symptoms such as tiredness, fever and headache, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhoea. Confusion, unusual behaviour, sleepiness, seizures, weakness, and abnormal movements may develop.

Encephalitis can cause permanent damage to the nervous system or death.

People of any age can become infected with JEV.

## How is it spread?

JEV is transmitted to humans through bites from mosquitoes carrying JEV.

It cannot be transmitted from person to person and cannot be transmitted by eating meat of infected animals.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can catch JEV, but those who spend time in areas where JEV has been detected are most at risk.

People who live and work along the River Murray have a higher risk of contracting Japanese encephalitis.

Some activities or conditions may put people at higher risk of exposure to JEV, including:

- > People who work directly with mosquitoes, pigs and water birds
- > People who work in wetland areas/areas with a high concentration of mosquitos
- > Undertaking night-time recreational activities such as camping, hunting or fishing
- > Rough sleeping
- > Living or sleeping in accommodation without screens
- > Working or undertaking other activities outside, particularly at night-time.

## Who is eligible?

The JEV vaccines are free for:

- > people aged 2 months and older who have a primary residence in one of the areas listed under 'Eligible Postcodes' below **AND** spend at least 4 hours per day outdoors most days.
- > people employed in a role located in one of the areas listed under 'Eligible Postcodes' below **AND** spend at least 4 hours per day outdoors as part of their occupation most days.

| Eligible postcodes | Largest town in area  |
|--------------------|---|
| 5214               | Goolwa  |
| 5238               | Mannum  |
| 5253               | Murray Bridge   |
| 5254               | Murray Bridge   |
| 5256               | Milang  |
| 5259               | Lake Alexandrina  |
| 5260               | Tailem Bend   |
| 5264               | Meningie  |
| 5320               | Morgan  |
| 5321               | Cadell  |
| 5322               | Qualco  |
| 5330               | Waikerie  |
| 5331               | Kingston-on-Murray  |
| 5332               | Moorook   |
| 5333               | Loxton  |
| 5340               | Paringa   |
| 5341               | Renmark   |
| 5342               | Monash  |
| 5343               | Berri   |
| 5344               | Glossop   |
| 5345               | Baramba   |
| 5346               | Cobdogla  |
| 5353*              | Cambrai * <i>only including the area east of Ridley Road/Halfway House Road but including the localities of Sedan and Cambrai</i> |
| 5354               | Swan Reach  |
| 5357               | Blanchetown   |

The JEV vaccines area also free for:

- > 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](#).

**The JEV immunisation program does not currently include people with a secondary residence/holiday house in one of these postcodes.**

**Persons who require JEV vaccine as they are travelling overseas are not eligible under this program, and instead should contact a travel medicine clinic.**

### I'm not eligible, when can I get it?

Vaccine supply is currently limited in Australia. The eligible groups may be expanded once more vaccine is available.

## What do I need to prove my eligibility?

People eligible to receive a JEV vaccine as listed above will need to provide evidence of primary residence (ie address linked to Medicare card) or a letter from their employer.

A template letter for employers is available at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/JEV](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/JEV)

## Which vaccines are used?

Two vaccines are available in Australia against JEV – **Imojev** and **JEspect**.

**Imojev** is a 'live' attenuated vaccine, which means it contains a weakened version of the live virus JEV. Imojev can be given to people from 9 months of age; however, Imojev cannot be given to pregnant or breastfeeding women, or people who are immunocompromised. You should avoid getting pregnant for 4 weeks after getting the Imojev vaccine. You cannot receive Imojev if you have had a product containing immunoglobulin in the preceding 3 months.

**JEspect** is an inactivated vaccine and can be given to those who cannot have the live vaccine. This includes infants from 2 months to less than 9 months of age, people who are immunocompromised and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Note: Some JEspect has been supplied by Seqirus with the trade name Ixiaro. ATAGI have advised *JEspect is also known as Ixiaro in some other countries (manufactured by Valneva and distributed in Australia by Seqirus/CSL).*

Tell your vaccine provider if you:

- > have had an allergic reaction after a previous dose of a JEV vaccine, or have had an allergic reaction to any component in the vaccine, including protamine sulphate (for the JEspect vaccine)
- > have previously received the JEV vaccine – you may need a booster dose. Your vaccine provider can also record your previous doses of JEV vaccine on the Australian Immunisation Register, even if you were vaccinated overseas
- > are pregnant or breastfeeding – you should not receive Imojev, but can have JEspect
- > have a weakened immune system – immunocompromised people should not receive Imojev, but they can have JEspect
- > have an infant between 2 months and 8 months of age – the infant should not receive Imojev, but can have JEspect.

## How many doses do I need?

Only one dose of Imojev is needed. Imojev is the main vaccine available for the 2022/23 JEV Immunisation Program.

You will need two doses of the JEspect vaccine, given 28 days apart. If you are a person at risk of immediate exposure, the 2 doses of the vaccine can be given 7 days apart if you are aged ≥18 years. You will be offered JEspect only if you are not able to have Imojev, as assessed by your immunisation provider.

Children from 2 months to less than 3 years of age will receive a lower dose (0.25 mL), which is half the dose given to people from 3 years of age (0.5 mL). Children less than 3 years of age requiring a JEspect will be referred to their GP.

## Can I have it if I am immunosuppressed or taking medication?

If you have concerns about the nature of the medications you are on, or are uncertain about your degree of immunosuppression, you should seek advice from your GP about using the alternative vaccine JEspect.

## Can these vaccines be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes, these vaccines can be given at the same time as other vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines.

The Imojev vaccine requires a 28-day (4 week) interval before and after another 'live' vaccine is given but can be given at the same time as another 'live' vaccine.

You cannot have Imojev for 3 months after a transfusion of immunoglobulin or blood product containing immunoglobulin.

## How long will these vaccines take to work?

A protective immune response will occur between 14 to 28 days after vaccination.

## How effective are these vaccines?

Both vaccines are highly effective and safe.

Most people (more than 95% of people) develop a protective immune response to the virus by about 28 days after getting the vaccines.

## Are these vaccines safe?

Yes, the vaccines are very safe.

The vaccines have been used extensively over many years in Australian Defence Force personnel, residents of the Torres Strait Islands and travellers to southeast Asia. Both vaccines are used extensively in childhood and some adult vaccination programs in countries with ongoing transmission of JEV.

As with any medicine, there is a very small chance of a vaccine causing a severe allergic reaction. Severe reactions to JEV vaccine are very rare.

Common side effects of JEV vaccines may include:

- > Pain, tenderness, redness, or swelling where the vaccine was given.
- > Fever may occur, more often in children.
- > Headache or muscle aches can also occur, mainly in adults.

Side effects usually occur within 3-7 days after receiving the vaccine and only last a few days.

## How long does immunity last?

Most adults will still have protection against JEV at 5 years after vaccination. However, it is recommended people who received a course of JEV vaccine more than 1 year ago have a booster dose now if at risk of exposure to JEV. The exception to this is people who received a dose of Imojev who are aged 18 years or over.

## Do I need to take other measures to protect myself against JEV?

You still need to protect yourself from mosquito bites because:

- > no vaccine is 100% effective
- > the JEV vaccines take a few weeks to provide protection
- > there are other mosquito-borne diseases in South Australia for which no vaccine is available (RRV, BFV, MVEV, WNV/KUN).

Protect yourself and your family against mosquito bites and mosquito-borne diseases by:

- > wearing long, loose fitting clothing
- > using insect repellent
- > eliminating the water the mosquitoes can breed in.

For more information visit [sahealth.sa.gov.au/fightthebite](https://sahealth.sa.gov.au/fightthebite)

## Have cases of JE been detected in South Australia?

As of 15 September 2022, there had been 40 human cases of JEV infection in Australia detected since December 2021.

Nine human cases have been diagnosed in SA. All cases in SA were hospitalised and there were two deaths.

## What do I do if I think I may have contracted JE?

If you have symptoms consistent with Japanese encephalitis, seek medical attention.

If you have any severe signs such as severe headache, vomiting, confusion, paralysis or seizures you should seek urgent medical attention.

## Where do I get more information?

- > Information on JEV: [sahealth.sa.gov.au/JEV](https://sahealth.sa.gov.au/JEV)
- > Fight the bite: [sahealth.sa.gov.au/fightthebite](https://sahealth.sa.gov.au/fightthebite)

If you have questions or need to report an adverse event following immunisation (AEFI) you can contact your GP, or phone the Immunisation Section, SA Health on 1300 232 272.

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## For more information

**Immunisation Section**  
**Communicable Disease Control Branch**  
**SA Health**  
**1300 232 272**

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