East African Trypanosomiasis

There are two types of African trypanosomiasis, also called *sleeping sickness*, named for the areas in Africa in which they are found. East African trypanosomiasis is caused by a parasite named *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense*. This disease is caused by the bite of an infected tsetse fly that is found only in Africa, and getting the disease does not give you immunity against future disease.

This disease can be contracted in parts of Eastern and Central Africa. The infected tsetse fly and wild animal population largely determine areas where infection is contracted. East African trypanosomiasis is usually found in woodland and savannah areas away from human habitation. Tourists, hunters, game wardens, and other persons working or visiting game parks in East and Central Africa are at greatest risk for illness.

SYMPTOMS

A bite by the tsetse fly is often painful and can develop into a red sore, also called a chancre. Fever, severe headaches, irritability, extreme fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, and aching muscles and joints are common symptoms of sleeping sickness. Some people get a skin rash. Progressive confusion, personality changes, slurred speech, *seizures* (convulsions), and difficulty in walking and talking occur when infection has invaded the central nervous system. If left untreated, infection becomes worse and death will occur within several weeks or months. The symptoms occur within 1 to 4 weeks of infection and there is not a medication or vaccine to prevent it.

DIAGNOSIS

Common tests include blood samples, a spinal tap, and skin *biopsies* (tissue samples), especially if you have a chancre.

TREATMENT

Treatment should be started as soon as possible, and is based on the infected person's symptoms and laboratory results. Medication is available through the CDC. Hospitalization is necessary for treatment. Periodic follow-up exams, including a spinal tap, are required for 2 years.

PREVENTION

- Wear protective clothing, including long-sleeved shirts and pants. The tsetse fly can bite through thin fabrics, so clothing should be made of thick material. Wear khaki or olive colored clothing. The tsetse fly is attracted to both bright and very dark colors.
- Use insect repellant. Though insect repellants have not proven effective in preventing tsetse fly bites, they are effective in preventing other insects from biting and causing illness.
- When sleeping, use bed-nets.
- Inspect vehicles for tsetse flies before entering. Do not ride in the back of jeeps, pickup trucks or other open vehicles. The tsetse fly is attracted to the dust that moving vehicles and wild animals create.
- Avoid bushes. The tsetse fly is less active during the hottest period of the day. It rests in bushes but may bite if disturbed.

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