

## **What You Need to Know About AFM**

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Program Manager

There has been increased attention to a rise in the number of cases of [acute flaccid myelitis](#) in recent weeks, with more than 100 confirmed or suspected cases in 22 states reported so far this year, including two cases treated at OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria, along with a third suspected case.

The Centers for Disease Control has been investigating at least 386 possible cases of acute flaccid myelitis since 2014

AFM is a rare neurological condition with sudden onset that affects a person's nervous system, specifically the spinal cord, and can cause muscle weakness and even paralysis. While the cause of most AFM cases is unknown, there are suspected links to enterovirus or the West Nile virus.

While parents should always be aware of a sudden change in their child's health, contracting AFM is rare.

"We have seen a surge of Acute Flaccid Myelitis in 2016 as well as in 2014. The incidence of this Acute Flaccid Myelitis is not very high, it's like one in a million pediatric patients but we do see it around the time of August to October," said Sreenivas Avula, MD, a pediatric neurology attending physician at OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois and the University of Illinois College of Medicine – Peoria.

He says while any age child can be affected, there has been a greater incidence in children under age 10.

There is no specific treatment for AFM and long-term implications are unknown. Dr. Avula says if you notice a sudden change in your child's behavior, or the onset of any weakness or paralysis anywhere in their body, seek medical attention immediately.

Dr. Avula says, as with any illness, an ounce of prevention can go a long way.

"Just like regular routine precautions, thorough handwashing can prevent infections. West Nile virus infection is caused by mosquitos so you must use mosquito repellent and it can prevent West Nile virus. So general hygienic precautions like handwashing."

Dr. Avula also recommends pregnant women avoid contact with anyone diagnosed with enterovirus as a precaution, because of the potential of passing the infection to the fetus.

Learn more about AFM [here](#).