



## **PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET**

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# **Guillain-Barré**

### **What is Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

Guillain-Barré (Ghee-yan Bah-ray) syndrome is a rare illness in which the body's immune system attacks nerves in the body.

### **Who gets Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

Although rare, the illness can affect anyone. This illness usually occurs a few days or weeks after a respiratory or stomach illness. Sometimes Guillain-Barré syndrome can occur after vaccinations, surgery or pregnancy.

### **What are the symptoms of Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

First symptoms occur suddenly and include weakness or a feeling of "pins and needles" in the legs which can spread to the arms and upper body. Over the next few weeks symptoms can either stay the same or become more severe leading to paralysis of certain muscles. Severe symptoms include trouble moving body parts, blurred vision, difficulty breathing and heart palpitations or pounding. These symptoms are rare but require immediate medical attention. Recovery is often slow, lasting over 6 months; however, most people recover completely.

### **What causes Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

It is not known what causes Guillain-Barré syndrome.

### **How does Guillain-Barré syndrome spread?**

Guillain-Barré syndrome does not spread from person-to-person.

### **What is the treatment for Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

There is no known cure for Guillain-Barré syndrome. Therapy is usually geared towards supportive care and lessening the severity of the illness.

### **How can I prevent Guillain-Barré syndrome?**

There is no known way to prevent Guillain-Barré syndrome.

**For more information, please contact  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control  
(617) 534-5611 or [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)**