

**EPIDEMIOLOGY AND LONG TERM OUTCOME OF
CHILDHOOD ENCEPHALITIS IN CRETE**

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BACKGROUND: Encephalitis is a severe infection with alarming symptoms and guarded prognosis. The epidemiology of encephalitis in Greece has not been fully investigated.

OBJECTIVES: The study of children admitted to the main referral Hospital of Crete during the 3 year period 2000-2002 with encephalitis. **METHODS:** 12 children aged from 2 and 13 years from various parts of Crete were included. Variables studied included aetiology, EEG and neuroimaging findings and the longterm outcome. Children with indications of sequelae were called for re-examination. **RESULTS:** All the children initially presented with clinical findings of CNS involvement, including alterations in mental status, cranial nerves paralysis, muscle weakness, personality and mood changes. Serologic evidence of a recent infection was found in 8 children (2 HSV, 2 Mycoplasma, 2 ECHO, 1 Rickettsia typhi, 1 CMV). Positive EEG findings were found in 6 and MRI findings in 7 children. 11 mothers responded to a phone questionnaire 6 to 30 months after the discharge from the hospital (mean 20.3 months). 4 out of 12 children were free of deficits and 2 reported only occasional mild headache and drowsiness. From the remaining 5 children, 4 had significant motor impairment improving with physiotherapy and 3 speech disorders improving with speech therapy. 5 out of 11 developed minimal behaviour disorders. **CONCLUSION:** Although no mortality or serious deficits were detected, encephalitis remains a severe disease with potentially disastrous complications. A high degree of clinical suspicion and appropriate treatment are required. Supportive physiotherapy and speech therapy were shown of considerable value.

