

## Triple E: The Thing We All Forgot About

Nicole Jo

Although some of you may not remember, we used to worry about a different virus that ravaged our community. I am talking about Eastern Equine Encephalitis, more commonly known as EEE. The EEE is a rare but dangerous virus causing brain damage as well as possible death. The virus is spread through the bites of infected mosquitos and these mosquitoes are found in swampy, wet areas. The virus typically attacks animals such as birds, but it can easily transmit to humans. Although the virus is rare, it requires some degree of concern because the fatality rate covers about a third of infected victims. By the end of 2019, the majority of cases found in the United States happened right here in Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup>

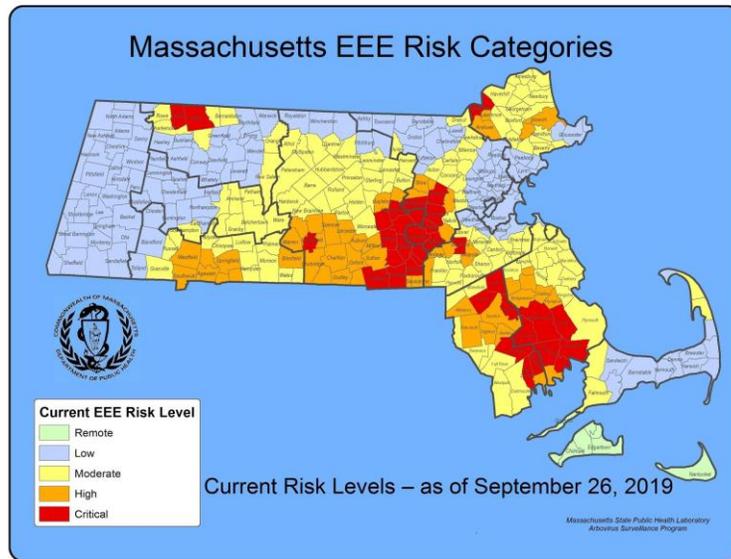
When I first heard about the EEE virus, I had a different reaction from the general public. On major social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, people would create memes about how everyone was “going to die” as well as some posts saying that we shouldn’t go outside at all. However, I had the data by my side. Being an alumni of the Outbreak! 2019 program here at the Public Health Museum, I learned about mosquito-borne illnesses through a learning seminar at the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory. We examined various mosquitoes and learned that there are different types that serve different purposes. We also learned about the systems that the state lab had in place to take care of the state population in the case of a disease-related emergency. I remember feeling okay because I knew that our public health officials were doing their best to ensure safety in our communities.

The outbreak of EEE led to awareness about what exactly public health is. People learned that we have a state Department of Public Health as well as ones for local towns and cities. People learned to be cautious and picked up advice on how to stay well.

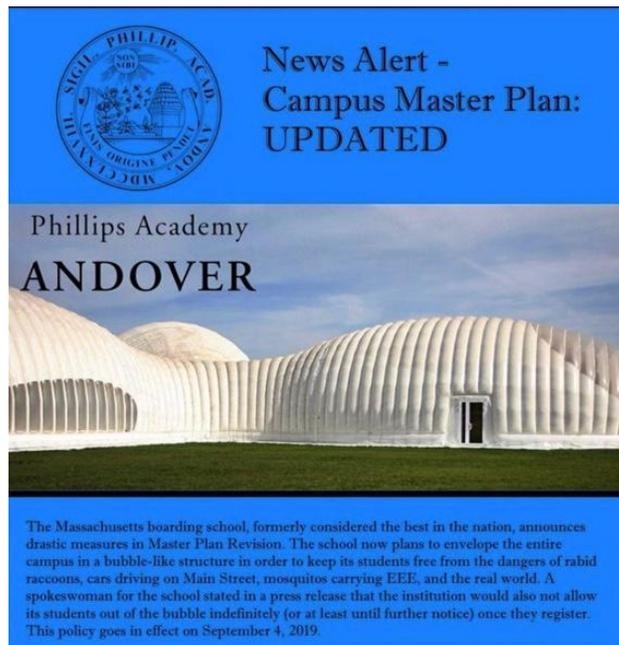
Finally, a hard frost occurred across all communities throughout the state and talk about the mosquito-borne illness began to cease. This virus began to slip into the back of our minds, tucked away and forgotten. As we entered 2020, we faced the beginning of the attacks for what we now know as COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> "EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis)." Mass.gov. Accessed May 13, 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/eee-eastern-equine-encephalitis>.



Here is an image of a map that was used to pinpoint “danger zones” for the virus.



Here is one of the various memes that were created to poke fun at the extreme measures in which people were reacting to the virus. This particular post is from an Instagram account (@pagorilla) run by students from Phillips Academy in Andover, MA.

About Nicole Jo:

Nicole Jo is a rising senior at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA. She currently resides in Tewksbury, MA right down the street from the Public Health Museum. She is interested in graphic design and marketing and has used these skills to help promote the Outbreak! summer program run by the museum.

