“Spring has arrived, and ticks are waking- it usually happens when the temperature outside is above + 5 C. Tick-borne encephalitis is very widespread in Latvia, and the proportion of infected ticks is high, which is why it’s very important to be protected from this illness. The only reliable and durable prophylaxis is vaccination against tick-borne encephalitis, because all other prevention methods– protective clothing, and use of tick repelling substances- aren’t effective enough,”, Dace Zavadska, paediatrician, head of the Children’s vaccination centre, and the department of education and science of the Children’s clinical university hospital, assistant professor at the Faculty of Medicine of Riga Stradins University.

“Vaccination is possible all year round from the age of 1 year. Why do we recommend vaccination during the cold months of the year? It’s done so that at the start of the tick activity season the person would be already protected, and not because vaccination in the summer would be harmful. 3 vaccine doses are necessary to induce immunity- the first two are given with a 1 month interval, and the third- less than 1 year later. After that revaccination is done 3 years later, and then every 5 years. You must remember that the elderly, as well as small children have a less persistent immune memory, which is why after the age of 60 years revaccination is necessary every 3 years. There are two vaccine brands available in Europe- manufactured in Austria and Germany- and they can be used in combination,” Dace Zavadska elaborates on the vaccination schedule.

People with allergic reactions shouldn’t be afraid- substances capable of causing allergies aren’t used in the production of these vaccines. Adverse reactions which are known to appear after vaccination- fever, pain, redness at the site of the injection, fatigue- are rarely seen after tick-borne encephalitis vaccines.

If the vaccination course hasn’t been completed or a revaccination has been forgotten, it isn’t necessary to start the vaccination cycle from the start, the person must receive the missed dose, and then has to be revaccinated every 5 years. The downside to missing revaccinations is that after the five year interval since the last vaccine, the person is no longer protected from tick-borne encephalitis. When the next vaccine dose is received, the person’s immune system produces once again enough antibodies to protect him/her for the next 5 years.

We have analysed many cases with serious neurological complications in Latvia. We should definitely discuss late complications of tick-borne encephalitis that appear one or more years later – those are prolonged, frequent headaches, migraines, difficulties to concentrate, attention deficit syndrome- even if initially the patient just had the fever form of the illness, which we once thought to be benign. Cases of death aren’t that common, but the quality of life changes significantly.