Health Warning to Avoid Mosquitoes

NSW Health is warning residents and visitors in western NSW to take extra precautions and protect themselves against mosquitoes following the detection of Murray Valley Encephalitis or MVE in Western NSW.

No human cases of MVE have been detected since 2008 in NSW when a case of MVE infection was detected in a person who lived near Macquarie Marshes, who recovered.

In mild cases, symptoms of MVE include fever, headache, nausea and vomiting and muscle aches. In more severe cases symptoms can include neck stiffness, lethargy, drowsiness, confusion, delirium, tremors, neurological problems and coma in severe cases. People with these symptoms should immediately seek medical assistance.

In young children, fever might be the only early sign, so parents should see their doctor if concerned, and particularly if their child has convulsions, drowsiness, floppiness, irritability, poor feeding or general distress.

Mosquitoes also carry other human diseases including Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus that can cause fever, rash and joint pains.

The MVE virus is transmitted by infected mosquitoes which breed in flooded, grassy and swamp areas and around rivers and waterways. The mosquito is especially active around dawn and around sundown, with a peak in the first two hours of the night.

Avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes that carry the virus are usually most active in the hours after sunset and again around dawn. Simple steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes include:

- When outside cover up as much as possible with light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and covered footwear.
- Use an effective repellent on all exposed skin. Re-apply repellent within a few hours, as protection wears off from perspiration, particularly on hot nights. The best mosquito repellents contain Diethyl Toluamide (DEET) or Picaridin.
- The stronger the concentration of an insect repellent, the less frequently it will need to be applied to stop mosquito bites. Repellents containing low concentrations of DEET or Picaridin provide shorter periods of protection and need to be reapplied more frequently so it’s important to read the product information.
- Topical repellents are not recommended for use on children under 3 months. Use of physical barriers such as netting of prams, cots and play areas is preferred. Repellents containing less than 10% DEET or Picaridin are safe for older children if applied according instructions. Parents or carers should apply repellent.
- Light mosquito coils or use vapourising mats indoors. Devices that use light to attract and electrocute insects are not effective.
- Cover all windows, doors, chimneys, vents and other entrances with insect screens.
- When camping, use flyscreens on caravans and tents or sleep under mosquito nets.

There is no specific treatment for these viruses so prevention depends on avoiding mosquito bites, especially in the summer and autumn months when infections peak.

For a copy of the NSW Health fact sheet on Murray River Encephalitis (MVE) virus, Ross River Fever or Barmah Forest virus go to:


or