

Mosquitoes can carry diseases

Mosquitoes can carry diseases that may be passed on to people through mosquito bites. In Australia, some of these include Murray Valley encephalitis virus, Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus and dengue fever. Periods of heavy rainfall or floods can lead to ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes, even in non-tropical areas. Diseases that are spread by insects are known as 'vector-borne' diseases.

Mosquito-borne diseases can make people ill and, in severe cases, can cause death.

How to avoid mosquito bites

There are many simple things you can do to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes:

- Avoid outdoor activity when mosquitoes are prevalent. Dusk and dawn is when most mosquitoes are more active but some will be around during the day.
- Wear long, loose fitting clothes if mosquitoes are around, preferably in light colours.
- Use effective mosquito repellents on exposed skin and clothing.
- Use 'knockdown' sprays and plug-in vaporising devices indoors.
- Sleep under mosquito nets treated with repellents or insecticides if you don't have flywire screens on windows.
- Outdoors, mosquito coils or citronella candles can be effective in small protected areas.

Choosing a mosquito repellent

Repellents come in liquids, lotions, gels, aerosols and pump sprays. It is important to make sure you choose a mosquito repellent that is safe and effective and that you always use it according to the instructions on the label. Look for the list of 'active constituents' on the label.

Creams and gels based on N,N-Diethyl-m-toluamide (DEET, or diethyltoluamide) or picaridin are currently regarded as providing the most effective form of protection. Most products provide protection for between one and three hours in typical situations. If you swim or sweat profusely, protection will be less and you may need to reapply.

You should also:

- Choose repellents in which the active constituent is DEET or picaridin (this will be shown on the label).
- Always read and follow directions on the label when using any pesticide product, including insect repellents.
- Apply the repellent sparingly to exposed skin, especially on children.
- Avoid parts of children's hands that may touch the eyes or mouth.
- Avoid using the repellent on a daily basis for prolonged periods. If long-term protection is needed, consult your pharmacist.
- Stop using the repellent immediately and consult your doctor if you suspect an allergic reaction.

Remember to store repellents where infants and young children can't reach them.

Control of mosquitoes around the home

You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home:

- Install flywire screens on all windows and self-closing wire screens on doors. Check them regularly and mend any holes.
- Prevent pools of water from forming – get rid of unused tins, tyres and similar rubbish, clean gutters and drains regularly and mend leaking taps.
- Change pets' drinking water and the water in vases, pot plants and bird baths at least once a week.
- Put sand around the base of pot plants to absorb excess water in the dish.
- Flush unused toilets once a week.
- Keep swimming pools chlorinated or salted and empty them completely when not in use for long periods.
- Empty children's wading pools regularly.
- Keep fishponds stocked with fish.

If you have a rainwater tank or alternative water storage devices:

- Make sure that any tops, lids, covers and inlet pipes are close fitting.
- Fit a removable screen mesh to the outlet end of overflow pipes and to all water inlets.
- Make sure any water collection containers have secure lids or screens.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Nurse-on-call Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for confidential health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Department of Health, Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit Tel. 1300 651 160
- Your local council – for information about mosquito control programs in your area

Things to remember

- Mosquito-borne diseases can cause illness.
- There are many simple things you can do to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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