
Ross River virus disease

Summary

- Ross River virus is spread by mosquito bites.
 - Joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and muscle aches are the usual symptoms of Ross River virus disease. Many infected people also develop a rash.
 - Reduce the chance of being bitten by mosquitoes by wearing long, loose-fitting, light coloured clothing and use effective insect repellent in mosquito-prone areas.
-

About Ross River virus disease

Ross River virus disease can cause joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and muscle aches. Many infected people also develop a rash of variable appearance. Most people recover completely within 3 to 6 months, although some people have intermittent symptoms for a year or more. Ross River virus disease is caused by an alphavirus, which is spread by mosquitoes. Symptoms usually begin to appear 3 to 9 (but up to 21) days after becoming infected. When in mosquito-prone areas, wear long, loose-fitting, light coloured clothing and use insect repellent containing DEET or Picaridin to help reduce the chance of being bitten by mosquitoes.

Symptoms of Ross River virus disease

Arthritis or joint pain is the most common symptom caused by Ross River virus disease. Wrists, knees, ankles, fingers and toes are the most commonly affected joints.

Other symptoms include:

- lethargy or fatigue
- muscle aches and pains
- rash of variable appearance on the trunk and limbs
- lymph node enlargement especially in the groin or armpit
- headaches
- fever.

Mosquitoes spread Ross River virus

People can be infected with Ross River virus when they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. It is suspected that mosquitoes pick up the virus from kangaroos and possibly other marsupials and wild rodents, which can act as a natural host for the virus. Diseases that are spread by insects are known as 'vector-borne' diseases.

There is no evidence that Ross River virus can be spread directly from one person to another.

Ross River virus disease is common in Australia

Ross River virus disease occurs throughout most regions of Australia including regional Victoria, particularly around inland waterways and coastal regions.

Epidemics occur from time to time and are related to environmental conditions that encourage mosquito breeding such as heavy rainfall, floods, high tides and temperature.

Blood tests will show if you have Ross River virus

Blood tests can reveal if a person has been infected with Ross River virus recently or in the past. If there has been an outbreak in your local area, the disease may be diagnosed by doctors solely on symptoms. However, blood

tests are recommended to confirm the diagnosis.

Most people recover from Ross River virus

Most people with Ross River virus disease recover completely within 3 to 6 months. Current knowledge suggests that the body builds an immune response to the virus, which is likely to protect you against the disease for the rest of your life.

Some people may have symptoms that last longer than a year or recur, but these may be due to other causes. See your doctor to check your diagnosis if you're concerned about ongoing symptoms.

Preventing Ross River virus disease

There is no preventive vaccine available. Your only protection against Ross River virus is to avoid mosquito bites.

To reduce the risk of infection:

- Wear long, loose-fitting, light coloured clothing and use insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin applied regularly, according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Avoid mosquito-prone areas, especially at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are more active and likely to bite.
- Ensure that your accommodation has fly screens properly fitted to windows and external doors.
- Reduce the number of potential mosquito breeding habitats around your home by ensuring no stagnant water is present. Containers holding water should be emptied and washed regularly.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Your local council
- **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 and Human Services, Communicable Disease Prevention and Control**, Victorian Government. Tel. **1300 651 160**
- **Beat the bite**

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

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2021 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.