Barmah Forest virus disease

Summary

- Barmah Forest virus is spread by mosquitoes.
- Joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and a rash are the usual symptoms of Barmah Forest virus disease.
- Reduce the chance of being bitten by mosquitoes by wearing long, loose-fitting clothes and using effective insect repellents in mosquito-prone areas.

Barmah Forest virus (BFV) disease can cause joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and a rash of variable appearance. A full recovery can be expected. Most people recover completely within six months, although some people have intermittent symptoms for longer.

Barmah Forest virus disease is caused by an alphavirus, which is spread by mosquitoes. Symptoms usually begin to appear between seven to ten (but up to twenty-one) days after becoming infected, however many patients infected with Barmah Forest virus will never develop any symptoms.

When in mosquito-prone areas, wear 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 Barmah Forest virus disease

The symptoms of Barmah Forest virus disease are similar to another mosquito-borne illness, Ross River virus disease, however they tend to be milder.

Symptoms include:

- lethargy or fatigue
- joint pain – may affect wrists, knees, ankles or small joints of the extremities, such as fingers or toes
- rash of variable appearance on the trunk and limbs
- muscle aches and pains
- fever.

Mosquitoes spread Barmah Forest virus

People can be infected with Barmah Forest virus when they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. While not proven, it is thought that mosquitoes pick up the virus from kangaroos, cattle and other animals that 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 Barmah Forest virus can be spread directly from one person to another.

Barmah Forest virus disease is common in Australia

Barmah Forest virus disease occurs throughout most regions of Australia, 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 high temperatures.

Blood tests will show if you have Barmah Forest virus

Blood tests can reveal if a person has been infected with Barmah Forest virus recently or in the past. If there has been an outbreak in your local area, the disease may be diagnosed by your doctor based solely on symptoms.
However, blood tests are recommended to confirm the diagnosis.

**Most people recover from Barmah Forest virus disease**

The majority of people with Barmah Forest virus disease recover completely within six 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 six months or recur, but these may be due to other causes. See your doctor to check your diagnosis if you are concerned about ongoing symptoms.

**Preventing Barmah Forest virus disease**

To reduce the risk of infection:

- Wear long, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and use effective insect repellents 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 flyscreens 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
- Your local council
- Department of Health Victoria, Communicable Disease Prevention & Control. Tel. 1300 651 160

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