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## Mosquitoes can carry diseases

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### Summary

- Mosquito-borne diseases can cause life-threatening illness.
  - There are many simple things you can do to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes.
  - Use an effective mosquito repellent, containing either picaridin or DEET, on all exposed skin.
  - Wear loose fitting clothes that cover your skin.
  - Try to limit outdoor activity if lots of mosquitoes are about (usually dusk and dawn).
  - Take action to prevent mosquito breeding around your home.
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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 virus. 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, including:

- Wear long, loose-fitting clothes if mosquitoes are around.
- Cover up as much as possible.
- Use an effective mosquito repellent on all exposed skin.
- Prevent mosquito breeding around your own home.
- Prevent mosquitoes from getting inside by using fly screens on windows and doors.
- Use mosquito coils or insecticide candles in small, outdoor areas.

### Choosing a mosquito repellent

Repellents come in lotions, gels, aerosols and pump sprays. Lotions and gels are easier to apply, though all repellents containing picaridin and DEET (N,N-Diethyl-m-toluamide or diethyltoluamide) are effective at repelling mosquitoes when used correctly.

Repellents containing picaridin or DEET are the most effective. These products are available in different strengths (known as 'concentrations') ranging from 3–100% DEET, or 10–20% picaridin. Higher concentrations provide protection for longer.

Natural repellents (such as Citronella or Eucalyptus) provide very limited protection from mosquitoes.

### How to use mosquito repellent

Like sunscreen, mosquito repellent is only effective if applied to all exposed skin. A few dabs here and there will not keep the mosquitoes away. Aim to apply a thin, even layer to all exposed skin.

Repellent may need to be reapplied frequently, particularly if you have been sweating from the heat or exercise. Mosquito repellent is not water-resistant like most sunscreens, and must be reapplied after swimming.

If using mosquito repellent in conjunction with sunscreen, apply the sunscreen first.

Remember:

- Choose mosquito repellents that contain picaridin or DEET as the active ingredient.
- Always read and follow directions on the label.
- Do not apply excessive repellent – use only a thin, even layer.
- Never allow young children to apply their own repellent. Avoid applying repellent to your children's hands, eyes and mouth.
- Always store repellents safely and out of reach of children.



### How to control mosquitoes around the home

You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites by preventing mosquitoes from breeding around your home by following these tips:

- Clean up your yard and remove anything where water can collect, such as unused pots and tyres.
- Cover or overturn trailers, wheelbarrows, boats, tools and children's playground toys to avoid water collection.
- Keep gutters and drains clean so water runs freely.
- Mend leaking taps.
- Change pet drinking bowls, bird baths and vase waters at least once a week, and more regularly in very warm weather.
- Put sand around the base of pot plants.
- Keep swimming pools well maintained or empty or securely covered if not in use.
- Keep fish ponds tidy with minimal vegetation around the edges.
- Keep lawns and gardens trimmed back to reduce the areas where mosquitoes rest.
- Check water tanks for gaps around lids, covers and inlet pipes. Fit a removable screen mesh to the outlet end of overflow pipes and to all water inlets if needed.
- Make sure any water collection containers have secure lids or screens.

You can reduce the risk of being bitten around your home by following these tips:

- Maintain fly screens on windows, doors, vents and chimneys. Screens should be no coarser than 12 x 12 meshes per 25mm, or 1.2mm.

- If mosquitoes are particularly bad, consider using a long-acting surface spray in areas where mosquitoes like to rest. Apply according to the directions on the bottle, targeting areas like the shaded shrubbery near your home. Avoid spraying these products near fish ponds.
- Use ceiling or floor fans to reduce the chance of bites in your home.
- Use 'knockdown' fly spray against visible mosquitoes in your home.
- Consider using plug-in mosquito 'zappers' or vaporisers in enclosed verandahs or mosquito-coils in outdoor areas. These should be switched off or put out as soon as the area is no longer in use.

### **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 and Human Services, Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit Tel. 1300 651 160
- Your local council – for information about mosquito control programs in your area.

### **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

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