

15 January 2015

Mosquito virus warning

South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) is warning residents and visitors to take extra precautions and protect themselves against mosquito bites and mosquito-borne diseases.

This is particularly important for people enjoying outdoor activities such as camping or fishing in areas with high mosquito numbers.

The District's Public Health Director, Dr Stephen Conaty said mosquito trapping around the Deepwater Park area of the Georges River last week showed high numbers of the saltmarsh mosquito, *Aedes vigilax*, following very high tides at the end of December.

"Barmah Forest virus and Ross River virus are spread by mosquitoes that feed on infected animals. Symptoms may include tiredness, rash, fever, and sore and swollen joints. While these symptoms usually subside after several days, some people may experience these symptoms for weeks, or even months," Dr Conaty said.

"Members of the public should see their local doctor if they experience these symptoms. The infection is diagnosed by a blood test and a second blood test taken two weeks after the first may be needed to confirm the diagnosis.

"There is no specific treatment for these viruses. The best way to avoid infection is to avoid being bitten," he said.

Simple steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes include:

- Avoid being outside, unprotected, when mosquitoes are common at dawn and dusk. Cover up as much as possible with light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and covered footwear.
- Apply mosquito repellent regularly to exposed areas (as directed on the container). Repellents containing Diethyl Toluamide (DEET) or Picaridin are best.
- Don't use repellents on the skin of children under the age of three months. Instead use physical barriers such as netting on prams, cots and play areas for babies.
- Eradicate mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as containers that hold water.
- Use flyscreens on windows and doors of houses and keep them in good order.
- When camping, use flyscreens, or sleep under mosquito nets.

"The Public Health Unit is monitoring notified cases of Ross River and Barmah Forest virus infection as in previous years to determine numbers of cases, and in particular, whether it seems likely the infection has been acquired locally or elsewhere," Dr Conaty said.

"No cases caught locally have been reported yet and we are hoping if people avoid bites from the saltmarsh mosquitoes using these simple steps, there won't be any."

For a copy of the NSW Health fact sheets on Barmah Forest virus and Ross River virus infections, go to:

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Barmah_Forest_virus_infection.aspx
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Ross-River-Fever.aspx>