

Date: 20th March, 2015

Experts advise residents to protect against mosquitoes

South Western Sydney Local Health District's Public Health Unit has urged people to take extra precautions to protect themselves against mosquitoes following a seven-fold increase in detections of the mosquito-borne virus, Ross River Fever, across the State compared with this time last year.

District Public Health Unit Director Stephen Conaty said it was the second time this year that NSW Health had issued a warning about mosquito-borne illnesses.

"Autumn is the peak time of the year for these insects to carry such infections so it is also when there is the highest number of mosquito-borne viral infections," Dr Conaty said.

"So far this year, NSW Health has seen an increase in reporting of people infected by mosquito-borne viruses.

"There have been 539 notifications of Ross River virus infections across the State compared with just 79 for the same period in 2014.

"So far this year there have been only three confirmed cases in south western Sydney residents.

"All of those people had travelled and probably acquired their infection elsewhere – we haven't had any proven cases of Ross River Virus or Barmah Forest Virus acquired locally.

"However, NSW Health's Arbovirus Monitoring Program has recently detected Ross River Virus and Barmah Forest Virus in mosquitoes in Sydney, including around the Georges River, the Homebush and Hawkesbury areas, as well as a number of other parts of the State.

"Overall we think the risk of infection for people who live around the Georges River is low, but it's not zero.

"Infections can cause symptoms including tiredness, rash, fever, and sore and swollen joints. The symptoms usually resolve after several days, but some people may experience these symptoms for weeks or even months.

"If you do experience these symptoms and have been bitten by mosquitoes you should visit your GP who can arrange tests.

"There is no specific treatment for these viruses. The best way to avoid infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

Dr Conaty said the next few weeks – when many people will be spending the Easter break outdoors – will be ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes carrying these viruses.

"It is particularly important for people planning to take trips during the Easter holidays to be prepared with measures to prevent mosquito bites."

Simple steps to avoid mosquito bites include:

- Avoid being outside unprotected, particularly during dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active. When outside 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
- When camping, use flyscreens, or sleep under mosquito nets
- Limit the number of places around your home for mosquitoes to breed by getting rid of items that hold water or by emptying the containers

For copies of the NSW Health fact sheet on Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus, Kunjin virus, and Murray Valley Encephalitis virus go to:

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

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/barmah-forest-virus.aspx>

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Kunjin_virus.aspx

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Murray-Valley-Encephalitis.aspx>