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Prevent mosquito bites this summer

South western Sydney residents holidaying in the Riverina, coastal areas or visiting the Georges River are being reminded to protect themselves against mosquito bites.

While infection with Ross River virus is rare in South Western Sydney residents, SWSLHD Acting Public Health Director, Dr Kate Alexander said people were at risk in all parts of the state, particularly in the Riverina area or if they are spending time where mosquitoes are more prevalent.

"There have only been 2 notifications of Ross River virus infections across the District in 2016 compared with 11 for the same period in 2015," Dr Alexander said.

"The best way to protect yourself from mosquito borne viruses is to avoid being bitten and use mosquito repellent containing picaridin or DEET, wearing loose fitting clothing when outside and ensuring holiday accommodation has fly screens," she said.

Mosquito trapping around the Deepwater Park area of the Georges River showed an increase in the numbers of the saltmarsh mosquito, *Aedes vigilax* but no identification of virus in the mosquitoes.

"*Aedes vigilax*, commonly called saltmarsh mosquitoes breed in saline and brackish water especially following floods and high tides," Dr Alexander said.

"People bitten by infected mosquitoes usually fall ill within three weeks and symptoms can include swollen joints, tiredness, rash and a fever.

"You should see your doctor if you experience symptoms associated with Ross River virus which may include tiredness, rash, fever, and sore and swollen joints," she said.

"The Public Health Unit continues to monitor notified cases of Ross River as well as another common mosquito-borne virus known as Barmah Forest virus infection as in previous years to determine numbers of cases, and in particular, whether the infection has been acquired locally or elsewhere," Dr Alexander said.

Dr Alexander urged people to be cautious and follow some simple steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Avoid being outside, unprotected, when mosquitoes are common at dawn and dusk, especially if you are holidaying in the coast. 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.
- 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.

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>