

Tuesday 4 February, 2020

Mosquito warning for Georges River area

High tides and dry weather have resulted in an increase in saltmarsh mosquito numbers along the Georges River, prompting a health warning to residents and visitors to the area to cover up.

Saltmarsh mosquitoes are potential carriers of the Ross River and Barmah Forest viruses and routine mosquito monitoring by South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's Public Health Unit this week has found the numbers of mosquitoes in the area to be 'very high', as categorised by the NSW Health surveillance program.

The District's Public Health Director, Professor Mark Ferson said while there have been no locally-acquired cases confirmed to date, people need to take due precautions to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

"There is no specific treatment for these viruses which can affect some people for months, so the best way to avoid infection is to avoid being bitten," Professor Ferson said.

"Last year, there were 570 Ross River notifications in NSW, so people need to protect themselves from bites and see their GP if they develop symptoms, which include tiredness, rash, fever, sore and swollen joints."

Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus are spread by mosquitoes that feed on infected animals.

Simple steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes include:

- Avoid being outside, unprotected, when mosquitoes are common at dawn and dusk. 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). Mosquito repellents containing Diethyl Toluamide (DEET) or Picaridin are best. Those containing oil of lemon eucalyptus also provide adequate protection.
- 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.

For local data on notifications in South Eastern Sydney residents with Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus infections, go to:

<https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/directory/public-health/public-health-data-and-research> and click on 'Arbovirus Surveillance Report.'

The Public Health Unit also provides public information on its Facebook and Twitter page.

For a copy of the NSW Health fact sheets on Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus and 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>