

13 March, 2017

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District updates warning on mosquitos around the Georges River carrying Ross River virus

The South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's Public Health Unit is again warning residents of and visitors to the Georges River area to take extra precautions and protect themselves against mosquito bites and mosquito-borne Ross River virus.

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

It comes after Ross River virus was detected on three occasions last week during trapping of the saltmarsh mosquito, *Aedes vigilax*, around the Illawong and Picnic Point area of the Georges River.

The District's Public Health Director, Professor Mark Ferson, said continuing very high tides may promote further breeding of the saltmarsh mosquito which has been breeding in high numbers since similar 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 symptoms for weeks, or even months," Professor Ferson 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."

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). 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," Professor Ferson said.

“One confirmed case was notified in a local resident in January and five possible cases are currently under investigation. We are hoping if people avoid bites from the saltmarsh mosquitoes using these simple steps, there won’t be any more cases.”

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

http://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/Public_Health/surveillance/default.asp and click on ‘Arbovirus Surveillance Report.’

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>

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