

18 March, 2015

## Residents urged to protect against mosquitoes

NSW Health is urging 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.

Acting Director, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Public Health Unit, Dr Catherine Bateman-Steel, said it's the second time this year that NSW Health has 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 Bateman-Steel 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.

"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.

"These 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.

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

"Mosquito surveillance has found increasing numbers of mosquitoes in many parts of the State. Even more are predicted as a result of high tides together with the recent heavy rains in parts of NSW."

Dr Bateman-Steel 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.

"Although the Public Health Unit has not yet identified any cases of disease in south-eastern Sydney caused by exposure to mosquitoes around the Georges River, this is a timely reminder to residents of the importance of mosquito avoidance measures.

"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/Kunjin_virus.aspx)

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

NSW Health routinely issues health alerts to inform the public on potential concerns regarding health and well-being which are available on the NSW Health website.

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au>

**South Eastern Sydney Local Health District**

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