

Barmah Forest Virus Infection

This is an illness caused by infection with the Barmah Forest virus, which is related to Ross River virus.

The infection is spread by mosquitoes from infected animals to humans. Native animals, such as wallabies and kangaroos, are thought to be the main animals involved in the cycle of infection. When a female mosquito feeds on the blood of an infected animal, the mosquito may become infected with the virus. The virus may then be passed on to humans or other animals when the mosquito feeds again. Direct person-to-person spread does not occur.

Many people infected with the Barmah Forest virus will not develop any symptoms, but others may develop:

- > rash, usually on the trunk or limbs
- > joint pain, which may persist for more than six months
- > tiredness and weakness
- > joint swelling and stiffness
- > flu-like symptoms, with fever, chills and headache
- > muscle aches and pain
- > swollen lymph glands.

Diagnosis is made by blood tests. Other illnesses with similar symptoms may need to be excluded.

Most people will recover completely within a few weeks but in a few the symptoms may persist for several months, and very rarely for more than a year. A full recovery can be expected.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Usually 7 – 10 days, but may be up to 21 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Direct person-to-person spread does not occur.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment available for this infection. Paracetamol may be used to treat pain and fever.

Control of spread

- > Exclusion from child care, preschool, school or work is not necessary.
- > Self protection from mosquito bites is the key to prevention.
- > There is no vaccine to prevent human infection of Barmah Forest virus infection by mosquitoes. Personal protection and the environmental management of mosquitoes are therefore essential.

Personal protection

- > Cover up with long, loose fitting clothing of sufficient thickness to prevent mosquitoes biting through the fabric.
- > Avoid exposure outdoors when mosquitoes are most active.
- > Use an insect repellent containing DEET or Picaridin (the most effective repellents contain 5-20% di-ethyl-N-toluamide or DEET) on exposed skin. Apply in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Avoid using on babies and toddlers.
- > Use flyscreens and mosquito nets in accommodation where there are no flyscreens, especially for babies. (This is particularly important when camping out, as repellents are only effective for around four hours).
- > Avoid mosquito-prone areas.

Barmah Forest Virus Infection (cont.)

Control of spread cont.

General mosquito control measures – eliminating mosquito breeding sites

Mosquitoes breed in still water (fresh, salty or stagnant). Stop mosquitoes breeding by cleaning up mosquito breeding sites around the home:

- > Dispose of all containers which hold water, or cover or put holes in them.
- > Empty pot plant drip trays once a week or put sand around pot bases to absorb water.
- > Empty bird baths and pets' drinking water at least every three days.
- > Boats, canoes and dinghies should be overturned or have the drain plug removed so that they do not hold water after rain.
- > Screen all openings to tanks, wells or other large water containers with wire gauze no coarser than 1mm mesh.
- > Keep roof gutters in good repair and regularly remove leaves and debris so that pools of water do not form.
- > Dispose of all waste water in such a way that no ponding occurs. Keep all open drains and channels free from obstruction, especially weeds, grass and other debris.
- > Keep fish ponds, ornamental ponds, dams and unused swimming pools stocked with fish which will eat mosquito larvae. Goldfish or Australian native fish are recommended.
- > Keep swimming pools disinfected or salted.

> Avoiding Mosquito Bites

Useful website

> Fight the Bite

<http://www.health.sa.gov.au/PEHS/publications/mozzies-fight-bite.htm>



Barmah Forest virus infection is a notifiable disease