

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is an infection caused by dengue viruses, of which there are four different serotypes.

The disease has a sudden onset and symptoms may include:

- > fever for three to seven days
- > intense headache and pain behind the eyes
- > muscle and joint pain
- > loss of appetite
- > vomiting and diarrhoea
- > skin rash
- > bleeding, usually from the nose or gums.

Recovery is sometimes associated with prolonged fatigue and depression. Repeated episodes of dengue fever may result in excessive bleeding and shock but with appropriate treatment are rarely fatal. Dengue fever occurs in tropical and subtropical areas of the world, including northern Australia.

In Australia the dengue virus is transmitted by a bite from the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Only the female mosquito transmits the dengue virus. This mosquito is a daytime biter, both inside and outside homes, and is most active in the hours after sunrise and before sunset. Other species of mosquito can transmit the virus but are not presently established in Australia.

Aedes aegypti mosquitoes breed inside and outside the home in containers holding water and rarely fly more than 200 metres from the breeding site. They do not breed in creeks, swamps, pools or other bodies of water.

Diagnosis of dengue fever is made by clinical examination and a blood test.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

3 – 14 days, commonly 4 – 7 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

A mosquito becomes infected if it bites an infected person while the fever is present (an average period of about 3 – 5 days). After biting an infected person it takes 8 – 12 days before the mosquito can infect other people. The mosquito remains infectious for life. Dengue is not directly spread from person-to-person.

Treatment

There is no specific antiviral treatment available. General recommendations include controlling fever and pain with paracetamol rather than aspirin (aspirin may promote bleeding), and increasing fluid intake.

Control of spread

- > Prevent access of mosquitoes to an infected person with a fever.
- > Protect yourself from mosquito bites at all times in dengue areas:
 - Wear loose fitting, light coloured clothing covering up as much of the body as possible. Mosquitoes can bite through tight fitting clothing, e.g. jeans.
 - Use insect repellents containing either:
 - > DEET (Diethyl toluamide). Always read the manufacturers instructions prior to application. Wash DEET off before going to bed in the evening. Do not use on infants if the DEET concentration exceeds 20%, or
 - > Picaridin, to cover areas of exposed skin.
 - Use 1mm insect screens on your house, boat, caravan or tent. If this is not possible, use a mosquito net.



Dengue is a notifiable disease

- > Serotype
- > Overseas Travel
- > Avoiding Mosquito Bites