

Ross River Virus

This is an illness caused by infection with the Ross River virus, which is related to Barmah Forest virus. It may also be known as Ross River fever.

Many people infected with Ross River virus, particularly children, have no symptoms and the severity of symptoms increases with age.

Symptoms vary from person to person and may include:

- > fever
- > chills
- > muscle aches
- > rash
- > fatigue
- > aching tendons
- > swollen lymph nodes.
- > headache, especially behind the eyes
- > joint pain, swelling and stiffness.

The most distinctive and distressing feature of Ross River virus infection is usually joint pain. Any joint in the body may be affected, but the most common sites are the wrists, knees, ankles, fingers, elbows, shoulders and jaw. The pain may be more severe in different joints at different times. In most cases, symptoms disappear within six weeks, though some people may still have symptoms after a year or two and the symptoms may come and go. About 10% of people have ongoing depression and fatigue.

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

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. In large outbreaks mosquitoes may also spread the virus from infected people to other people.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

3 days to 3 weeks, usually 1 – 2 weeks.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Direct person-to-person spread does not occur.

Treatment

There is no specific antiviral treatment for Ross River virus and no vaccine to prevent infection. Paracetamol may be used to treat pain and fever.

The Arthritis Foundation of South Australia provides a very helpful fact sheet on dealing with the symptoms. This can be obtained by phoning its telephone information service on 1800 011 041.

Control of spread

- > Exclusion from child care, preschool, school or work is not necessary.
- > Self protection from mosquito bites is the key to prevention.

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.

Ross River Virus (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 pet 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.



Ross River virus infection is a notifiable disease

- > **Avoiding Mosquito Bites**

Useful website

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