

Barmah Forest Virus

Description:

Barmah Forest virus is the name given to a virus that is carried by mosquitoes. The mosquito may have contracted the virus from infected marsupials particularly possums, kangaroos and wallabies or from infected humans. The infection is not fatal and all people who develop the disease do recover. Australia is the only country where Barmah Forest virus has been identified. There are over 400 cases of Barmah Forest virus reported in Queensland each year.

Symptoms:

Barmah Forest virus causes inflammation and joint pain and has similar symptoms to Ross River virus infection (epidemic polyarthritis), but usually lasts for a shorter duration. The symptoms may include fever, headache, tiredness, painful joints, joint swelling, muscle tenderness, and skin rashes. Some people, especially children, may become infected without showing any symptoms.

The initial fever and discomfort only lasts a few days but some people may experience joint pain, tiredness and muscle tenderness for up to six months. Most people can return to work within a few days of becoming ill, although joint and muscle pain may cause some longer term restrictions in some occupations.

The virus is passed to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. It cannot be passed directly between humans.

Most people become unwell within three to 11 days after being bitten by an infectious mosquito.

Treatment:

There is no specific drug treatment for Barmah Forest virus infection. Treatment involves managing the symptoms that develop. Your doctor will advise on treatment for joint and muscle pains. A combination of plenty of rest, and gentle exercise are important to keep joints moving and to prevent overtiredness but medication may sometimes be necessary.

Health Outcome:

Cases of long illness can be distressing. Often when people experience long term severe tiredness, they may feel depressed.

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Prevention:

The best prevention is to take precautions against being bitten by mosquitos:

- use insect repellents and wear protective, light coloured clothing
- avoid being outside during times of heavy infestation of mosquitoes, eg. early evenings in the warmer months
- screen living and sleeping areas
- check your home regularly for potential mosquito breeding areas, eg. any uncovered water containers, small wading pools and old tyres should be emptied regularly.

Mosquito eradication programs are the most effective way to control spread of disease. Health officers from most local councils and state health departments work together to develop and implement mosquito eradication programs.

Help and Assistance

For further information, please contact your local doctor, or nearest public health unit.

Footnote

Heymann, D., ed. 2004. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 18th edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, pp 35-37.