

## What is MVE?

Encephalitis is inflammation of the brain tissue and is usually caused by an infectious agent such as a virus. MVE is potentially fatal and a person is infected after being bitten by a mosquito carrying the MVE virus.

## How is MVE spread?

The MVE virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito (usually *Culex annulirostris* also known as the 'common banded' mosquito). Not all of these mosquitoes carry the virus, and only about 1 person in 1000 who get bitten by infected mosquitoes will become unwell.

Many people who have the virus show no symptoms. There is no evidence of person to person transmission.

## Where does MVE usually occur?

Although MVE can occur throughout most parts of Australia, it is most common in northern Australia. Recently MVE virus has been identified in chickens in the Murray Valley region. These chickens are used as an early warning system for possible human cases of MVE in the area.

There have been no human cases reported to date.

## What are the symptoms?

It can take 7 to 28 days between getting bitten and becoming sick.

Symptoms include: high fever, severe headache, seizure or fits (especially in young children), neck stiffness, drowsiness, confusion and progression to delirium and coma in severe cases.

## What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment or vaccine available for MVE and care is largely supportive.

## How can MVE be prevented?

The only protection from MVE is to *avoid being bitten by mosquitoes*. This applies to all residents and travellers throughout the region where mosquitoes are prevalent.

Everyone should take measures to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, particularly those visiting and camping in or near swamp or river systems during the evening and night, and in rural areas near sites of relatively high mosquito activity.

*Mosquito protection for young children and babies is absolutely essential.*

## Personal protection includes:

- Avoid being outside when mosquitoes are most active, usually before dawn and from just before and until 2 hours after sunset.
- Wear loose light coloured clothing with long sleeves, long trousers and socks (mosquitoes can bite through tight-fitting clothes).
- Apply a protective repellent containing up to 20 percent diethyl toluamide (DEET) or picaridin to exposed areas of skin. Lotions and gels are more effective and long lasting than sprays.
- Ensure flyscreens in houses or caravans are in good repair.
- If camping out, either sleep in a mosquito-proof tent or under a mosquito net. Repellents only protect against mosquito bites for up to four hours, not all night.

**Further information** can be obtained from the Department of Human Services Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit on 1300 651 160