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| Japanese encephalitis |
| Frequently asked questions  |
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## What is Japanese encephalitis?

Japanese encephalitis (JE) is a rare but potentially serious infection of the brain caused by a virus that can be spread to humans through mosquito bites. Most people infected with JE virus (about 99%) do not have any symptoms or have mild symptoms.

## Am I at risk of JE virus?

JE virus is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito, primarily the Culex species. **Not all mosquitoes can carry the JE virus.** However, in Victoria, mosquitoes can transmit a number of other infections including Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus and Murray Valley encephalitis.

People most at risk of JE virus include people in northern Victoria, and along the Murray River who:

* spend significant time outdoors
* are in flood affected areas.

People who work or live on properties with pigs are also considered at-risk.

While it is important to be aware of the potential presence of JE virus in these areas, the risk of contracting JE virus and developing serious illness remains low. However, anyone being bitten by mosquitoes in these areas is potentially at risk.

## What can I do to protect myself from JE?

The most effective way to reduce your risk of Japanese encephalitis virus infection and other mosquito-borne diseases is by avoiding mosquito bites and removing mosquito breeding sites around your home.

Protect yourself and your family from [**exposure to mosquitoes**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease)and mosquito-borne diseases:

* Wear long, loose fitting clothes and covered shoes outdoors.
* Use mosquito repellents containing picaridin or DEET on all exposed skin.
* Limit outdoor activity if lots of mosquitoes are about.
* [**Use ‘knockdown’ fly sprays and plug-in repellent devices indoors**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/mosquitoes-protect-your-home-checklist).
* Cover all windows, doors, vents, and other entrances with insect screens.
* Sleep under mosquito nets treated with insecticides if you don’t have insect screens on windows on your home or are sleeping in an untreated tent or out in the open.
* Mosquito coils can be effective in small outdoor areas where you gather to sit or eat.
* Make sure there is no stagnant water around your home or property by emptying pots and containers at least once a week.
* Visit our [**Protect yourself from mosquito-borne disease page**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease)for more information.

## Who is eligible for free Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus vaccination in Victoria?

In Victoria, a JE vaccine is available free-of-charge for specific priority groups residing or working in high-risk areas, where exposure to the virus is considered more likely.

In Victoria, JE vaccine is available to the following priority groups:

Local government area-specific:

* People aged 2 months or older who live or routinely work in any of the following local government areas of Campaspe, Gannawarra, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Loddon, Mildura, Moira, Swan Hill, Wodonga, Towong, Benalla, Wangaratta and Strathbogie **AND**:
	+ regularly spend time engaging in outdoor activities that place them as risk of mosquito bites, **OR**
	+ are experiencing homelessness, **OR**
	+ are living in conditions with limited mosquito protection (e.g. tents, caravans, dwellings with no insect screens), **OR**
	+ are engaging in outdoor flood recovery (clean-up) efforts, including repeated professional or volunteer deployments. \*

*\*Vaccination can be administered before arrival in flood affected areas to those from other regions deployed for recovery efforts by arrangement.*

The risk of exposure to mosquitoes is low if you are at an elevation over 500 metres. Therefore, JE vaccination is only recommended for people who spend significant time outdoors below this elevation in these priority areas.

No restriction to local government areas:

* People who work at, reside at, or have a planned non-deferable visit to a:
	+ piggery, including but not limited to farm workers and their families (including children aged 2 months and older) living at the piggery, transport workers, veterinarians and others involved in the care of pigs
	+ property that has been confirmed to be infected with JE virus
	+ property suspected to be infected with JE virus
	+ pork abattoir or pork rendering plant.
* Personnel who work directly with mosquitoes through their surveillance (field or laboratory based) or control and management, and indirectly through management of vertebrate mosquito-borne disease surveillance systems (e.g., sentinel animals) such as:
	+ environmental health officers and workers (urban and remote)
	+ entomologists.
* All diagnostic and research laboratory workers who may be exposed to the virus, such as persons working with JE virus cultures or mosquitoes with the potential to transmit JE virus, as per the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

For more detail please visit the [Department of Health apanese encephalitis virus website](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/japanese-encephalitis-virus) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/japanese-encephalitis-virus>.

## I live in a flood affected area; should I have the JE vaccine?

In flood affected areas in high-risk LGAs, those who spend significant time outdoors, or who are living in conditions with limited mosquito protection, or those engaging in flood recovery efforts should consider getting vaccinated. Despite an increased presence of mosquitoes in flood-affected areas, not all mosquitoes carry the JE virus and therefore the risk of being infected remains low. Protection from mosquito bites remains the most important strategy in flood affected areas.

## Why can’t everyone get a JE vaccine?

Victoria has a limited supply of JE vaccines due to a global vaccine shortage. If you are not someone who is at highest risk of infection with JE virus ([identified above](#_Who_is_eligible)), then you are not eligible for a free JE vaccine. If you are unsure, speak to your GP, local council, community pharmacy, local public health unit or Aboriginal health service.

## I am going on holiday to an area identified as high risk. Can I get a JE vaccine?

Due to limited vaccine availability, if you are not someone who is living or regularly working in an area at highest risk of infection with JE virus ([identified above](#_Who_is_eligible)), then you are not eligible for a free JE vaccine.

## I am an emergency response worker and will be deployed to an area identified as high risk to assist in flood recovery. Can I get the JE vaccine?

If you are engaged in outdoor flood recovery (clean-up) efforts, including repeated professional or volunteer deployments, then you can get the JE vaccine. Vaccination can be administered before arrival in flood affected areas to those from other regions deployed for recovery efforts by arrangement. People listed in the specific priority groups are advised to contact their general practitioner, local public health unit, local council or community pharmacy for more information.

## What are the current vaccination criteria based on?

Vaccination criteria are based on a combination of where human exposures occurred during the last mosquito season, where infected mosquitoes were trapped, where infected animals were identified, as well as modelling and mapping of environmental and vector conditions.

## Will I incur any cost for vaccination?

In Victoria, JE vaccine is available free-of-charge and is available for eligible individuals.
**Please note, some providers may charge an administration or consultation fee. Be sure to check if this applies to you.**

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| **Service provider** | **Cost** |
| Local public health unit | Free |
| Local council immunisation service | Free |
| GP or medical clinic | An administration or consultation fee may apply unless vaccine is given at a bulk billing medical centre. |
| Pharmacy | An administration or consultation fee may apply |

## Can vaccinated people still catch JE?

Over 95% of people develop protection against JE virus by about 14-28 days after completing the primary vaccination schedule. Vaccinated people should still take measures to avoid mosquito bites, as not all mosquito-borne diseases have a vaccine available to prevent infection. Refer to the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease>> for more information.

## What vaccine will I receive?

Imojev® vaccine is prioritised in Victoria’s current public health response.

Imojev®, is available for people aged ≥9 months and requires only a single dose. Imojev® is contraindicated (cannot be given to) in some people because it is a live attenuated viral vaccine (see below). Women should avoid pregnancy for 28 days after vaccination.

If a person is eligible for a JE vaccine but cannot receive Imojev®, JEspect® can be used on the authorisation of the department.

JEspect® should only be used for people who meet the vaccination eligibility criteria AND are:

* immunocompromised\*, OR
* aged 2 months to < 9months, OR
* people requiring their second dose, OR
* pregnant or breastfeeding, OR
* within 6 weeks (preferably 3 months) of receiving immunoglobulins or immunoglobulin- containing products.

\*For the purposes of JE vaccination, immunocompromise refers to people:

* with immune deficiency (including IFNAR1 deficiency)
* on immune suppressing therapies, such as chemotherapy, biological or targeted synthetic disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs, or high doses of systemic corticosteroids given for 14 days or more
* with HIV infection with uncontrolled viraemia

## What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Common side effects of JE vaccines are:

* pain,
* tenderness,
* redness and
* swelling at the injection site.

Fever may occur and is more common in children. Headache or muscle aches can also occur, mainly in adults. These side effects usually go away within a few days. Severe reactions to JE vaccine are very rare.

## Is the vaccine safe if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Pregnant women who meet the eligibility criteria listed above are recommended to receive JEspect® inactivated JE vaccine. No adverse outcomes of pregnancy have been attributed to vaccination with JEspect® vaccine. Infection with JE virus during the first and second trimesters has been associated with miscarriage, so it is recommended pregnant women are vaccinated against JE virus if they are at risk of infection.

Breastfeeding women who meet the eligibility criteria listed above are recommended to receive JEspect® inactivated JE vaccine in preference to Imojev® vaccine.

## Further information

Visit the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease) for more information about mosquito-borne disease prevention and Japanese encephalitis <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/protect-yourself-mosquito-borne-disease>>.

For questions about the JE vaccine speak with your GP, local council, community pharmacy or local public health unit or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).

To receive this document in another format, email the Immunisation Unit <immunisation@health.vic.gov.au>.

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Available at [Japanese encephalitis virus](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/japanese-encephalitis-virus) <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/japanese-encephalitis-virus>>