

Dengue

Dengue (also called dengue fever) is a viral disease caused from being bitten by dengue-infected mosquitoes, which are present in many tropical countries.

The mosquitoes that carry dengue are not found in New Zealand, so the virus is only caught while overseas. There is no widely-available vaccine to protect people against dengue. The best prevention is to minimise the risk of mosquito bites when overseas.

People who have previously been infected with dengue fever are at an increased risk of developing severe dengue if they contract the virus again.

How it spreads

People get dengue when they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. Dengue cannot be spread from person to person like a cold or the flu.

Symptoms

Dengue symptoms usually develop about four to seven days after being bitten by an infected mosquitoes.

Common symptoms are:

- a sudden, high fever
- an intense headache (especially behind the eyes)
- muscle and joint pain
- feeling very tired
- nausea/vomiting
- a rash on arms and legs; severe itching and peeling skin

Dengue symptoms usually last around two to seven days.

If you develop dengue symptoms after travelling, immediately seek health advice from your GP or call Healthline for free anytime at 0800 611 116.

Severe dengue

In rare cases, dengue can develop into severe dengue (also known as dengue haemorrhagic fever), which can be fatal. People with severe dengue symptoms require hospitalisation because the disease is life-threatening.

Your risk of developing severe dengue increases if you are infected with dengue more than one time.

The warning signs of severe dengue include:

- severe abdominal pain
- persistent vomiting

- bleeding nose or gums
- vomiting blood
- rapid breathing

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for dengue, however, you can ease your symptoms by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Getting plenty of bed rest.
- Taking paracetamol to manage pain at recommended doses.

If you are taking medication for another condition, talk to your healthcare provider before taking additional medication.

If you have dengue, do not take aspirin, ibuprofen or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as this can increase the risk of bleeding.

Prevention

For most travellers, there are currently no drugs or vaccine available to prevent dengue. The main method of prevention is to avoid mosquito bites when overseas.

To avoid being bitten while inside it is best to have:

- Screens on doors and windows.
- Insect sprays.
- Electric insect-repellent devices, or mosquito coils.
- Permethrin insecticide on clothes (permethrin can be bought at Travel Medicine Clinics).
- A mosquito net over your bed at night. You can spray this with permethrin if you wish.

- Turn on air conditioning if you have it. Air conditioning is very effective at keeping mosquitoes out of a room.

To avoid being bitten outdoors:

- Wear a repellent cream or spray containing less than 35% diethyltoluamide (DEET). High concentrations are not more effective and can be harmful. Products containing 20-25% picaridin or 30% lemon eucalyptus oil can also be used.
- When using sunscreen, apply repellent over the top of sunscreen.
- Wear light-coloured protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants and hats. Clothing can be treated with repellent.
- Use zip-up screens on tents.
- Avoid places where mosquitoes are most active, such as swampy areas.
- Wear hats and shoes (rather than sandals).

You normally find more mosquitos around in the early morning and late afternoon, so it's important to be particularly careful during these times.

For more information

For further advice on mosquito-borne illnesses and travel advisories, see www.safetravel.govt.nz

For more information, visit:

www.arphs.health.nz/dengue-fever/

For health advice call Healthline for free on 0800 611 116, or contact your doctor.