

Ross River Virus (RRV) – Important facts you need to know

What is the RRV?

RRV is a small single-strand infectious alphavirus endemic to Australia, Papua New Guinea and other islands in the South Pacific.

RRV is responsible for a type of mosquito borne, non-lethal tropical and subtropical disease known as Ross River Fever, previously known as “Epidemic Polyarthritis”. RRV spread from the tropics of Australia (Far North Queensland) to the Alpine regions of NSW and Victoria).

Approximately 4000 people are infected with the virus every year, and it is becoming more common on the fringes of urban areas.

Currently, there is a high level of RRV activity as a result of the extreme weather event and mass flooding Australia’s Eastern Seaboard is experiencing.

What are the Symptoms?

It is evident that many people who are infected with the virus will never develop symptoms however symptoms may include:

- Fever, chills, headaches, aches and pains in the muscles
- Swollen and stiff joints. Mainly in the morning after a night of rest
- One or multiple rashes, most commonly on the body, arms or legs. The rash usually disappears after 7-10 days
- The feeling of lethargy and generally feeling unwell, tired or weak may occur at times during the illness.
- Symptoms of RRV will usually develop 7 to 10 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Whilst most people recover completely within a few weeks, others may experience symptoms such as joint pain and tiredness for many months post first infection.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is spread by certain types of female mosquitoes:

- Female mosquitoes feed on animals, livestock and people. If they feed on the blood of an infected animal, the mosquito may become infected. The virus then multiplies within the mosquito and is passed to other animals or people when the mosquito feeds again.
- The number of infections tends to peak in the summer and autumn months.
- The virus is not spread directly from one person to another

Document Name	Document Number	Version Number	Issue Date	Review Date	Next Review Date	Authorised by	Position
Safety Alert Template	Form 18.0	2	Mar 2022	Mar 2027	Mar 2027	Brad Honeyman	Chief Executive Officer

Who is at risk?

People who are in contact with known mosquito habitats and who live in warm, humid climates near bodies of water will be most risk of infection. Ross River Virus infections are the most common mosquito-borne infection in Australia, and infections occurs in many rural areas in NSW. Infections are uncommon in major cities and towns. Outbreaks can occur when local conditions of rainfall, tides and temperature promote mosquito breeding.

How can RRV be prevented?

There currently aren't any vaccines against RRV, however the best method of reducing the risk of diseases mosquitoes transmit:

- Wear loose-fitting long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside near bodies of fresh and / or blackwater
- Liberally apply mosquito repellent to exposed skin
- Take special care during peak mosquito biting hours, especially around dawn and dusk
- Remove potential mosquito breeding sites from around the home and screen windows and doors
- Take extra precautions when travelling or camping in areas with a higher risk of mosquito-borne diseases

How is it diagnosed?

RRV is diagnosed by detection of antibodies against the virus in the blood. It usually requires comparison of a blood test taken early in the illness and with another sample taken two weeks later to confirm the infection.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for RRV. Your doctor will be able to advise you on medications that will help ease the discomfort of the symptoms.

What is the public health response?

Laboratories are required to notify cases of Ross River, and other mosquito-borne diseases to the public health unit. Public health staff monitor the geographic spread of Ross River virus infections and provide information about avoiding mosquito-borne diseases.

Further information

- [Mosquitoes are a Health Hazard fact sheet](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/mosquito.aspx) : <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/mosquito.aspx>
- For more information, please call your local public health unit on **1300 066 055** or your HSEQ Officer on 0477 355 901

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