



Media Release

18 May 2020

Pilbara and Kimberley warned of increased Murray Valley encephalitis risk

The Department of Health is warning Pilbara and Kimberley residents to take additional precautions to avoid mosquito bites following continued detections of Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) virus, with activity now extending further into the Pilbara region.

This warning will also be important for individuals looking to travel to the Pilbara region, from the Mid West and Gascoyne, as some travel restrictions are relaxed this week.

While no human cases of MVE have been reported this year, evidence of the virus continues to be detected from the sentinel chicken surveillance program coordinated by the Department of Health, PathWest and local governments, to provide early warning of virus activity.

Department of Health A/Managing Scientist, Dr Abbey Potter, said MVE was transmitted by mosquitoes and had no specific cure or vaccine.

“The only effective protection against the virus is to take precautions to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes,” she said.

“While the risk of being infected and becoming unwell is low, the illness caused by the virus can be severe and potentially fatal.”

Initial symptoms of MVE include fever, drowsiness, headache, stiff neck, nausea and dizziness. People experiencing these symptoms should seek medical advice quickly. In severe cases, people may experience fits, lapse into a coma, be left with permanent brain damage or die.

In young children, fever might be the only early sign of infection. Parents should see their doctor or local health services if concerned, particularly if their child experiences drowsiness, floppiness, irritability, poor feeding, or general distress.

It is important that residents of the Pilbara and Kimberley take some simple steps to avoid mosquito bites. To minimise the chance of being bitten by mosquitoes, people should:

- avoid outdoor exposure, particularly at dawn and early evening;
- wear protective (long, loose-fitting, light-coloured) clothing when outdoors;
- apply an effective personal repellent containing diethyltoluamide (DEET) or picaridin evenly to all areas of exposed skin and always follow the label instructions;
- ensure infants and children are adequately protected against mosquito bites, preferably with suitable clothing, bed nets or other forms of insect screening;

- remove water holding containers from around the home and garden to ensure mosquitoes do not breed in your own backyard;
- use mosquito coils and mosquito lanterns and apply barrier sprays containing bifenthrin in patio and outdoor areas around houses; and
- ensure insect screens are installed and in good condition on houses and caravans;
- use mosquito nets and mosquito-proof tents if sleeping outside.

For more information about mosquito prevention visit:

<http://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Healthy-living/Prevent-mosquito-bites>

ENDS

Media contact: (08) 9222 4333

Follow us on Twitter: [@WAHealth](https://twitter.com/WAHealth)