

## Warning: Risk of mosquito viruses increases with recent floods

Hunter New England Health is warning people living in the New England/North West region to take precautions against mosquitoes following the recent floods.

The summer increase in mosquito activity has already occurred and with this a number of confirmed human cases of Ross River Fever.

It is expected this will increase as a result of the recent heavy rain and the large amounts of pooled water, providing a perfect breeding area for freshwater mosquitoes. It only takes two to three weeks to produce large numbers of mature mosquitoes.

Public Health Physician Dr David Durrheim advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, which spread Ross River disease.

"This virus is spread by mosquitoes that feed on animals that have the infection," Dr Durrheim said.

"Symptoms for Ross River include painful joints, tiredness, headaches, rash and fever. These diseases are not fatal, but can cause severe debilitating symptoms," said Dr Durrheim.

"A small number of people with these virus infections have persistent symptoms for several months."

"As there is no specific treatment for Ross River Virus - prevention depends on avoiding mosquito bites," Dr Durrheim said.

"It is well known that only a small proportion of Ross River Fever cases actually get reported, so this could mean that there have been lots of people infected that don't even realise that they have this virus."

Methods for avoiding mosquito bites include:

- avoiding being outside unprotected before dawn and after dusk
- avoiding known high risk breeding sites, including marsh areas
- when outside wearing loose fitting, light coloured clothes that cover your arms and legs
- using an insect repellent, that contains the chemical DEET or picaridin, on exposed skin
- fitting fly screens to all windows and doors and keeping these in good repair
- if mosquitoes are inside, using a knockdown insecticide in bedrooms half an hour before going to bed according to instructions