

Chikungunya virus infection

Fact sheet

Chikungunya is transmitted to people by mosquitoes infected with the Chikungunya virus. Symptoms include fever, rash and sore joints. The virus is mainly found in Africa, Asia, the Western Pacific and the Americas. Travellers to affected areas should avoid mosquito bites to prevent infection.

What is chikungunya virus infection?

Chikungunya virus infection (chikungunya) is caused by a virus that is spread by two types of mosquitoes:

- the Dengue mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*)
- the Asian Tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*).

What are the symptoms of chikungunya?

Symptoms of chikungunya include:

- fever, chills, headache and muscle pain
- joint swelling, stiffness and pain, especially in the mornings
- a rash, usually on the trunk or limbs. This usually lasts for 7 - 10 days
- a feeling of tiredness or weakness.

Symptoms usually develop about 7-10 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Most people infected with the chikungunya virus recover in a few weeks. Some people might experience tiredness for many weeks and joint pain for many months.

How is chikungunya spread?

People develop chikungunya virus infection after being bitten by a mosquito that is infected with the virus. Chikungunya is not spread directly from person to person.

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on somebody who has chikungunya virus in their blood. Once infected, the virus multiplies inside the mosquito and can infect other people when it bites them.

Who is at risk of getting chikungunya?

Chikungunya virus occurs in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Western Pacific. People who travel to places where chikungunya occurs are at risk of infection if bitten by the types of mosquito that can spread the infection (Dengue mosquito or Asian Tiger mosquito).

Chikungunya can be more serious for:

- older adults aged over 65 years
- newborn babies infected around the time of birth
- people with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

How is chikungunya prevented?

There is currently no vaccine against chikungunya.

To protect against mosquitoes and reduce the risk of diseases they transmit:

- cover up while outside (wear loose, long-sleeved, light-coloured clothing and covered footwear and socks). Mosquitoes can bite through tight clothing
- apply mosquito repellent evenly to all areas of exposed skin. The most effective repellents contain picaridin, DEET or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Natural or homemade repellents provide limited protection. Read the instructions to find out how often you should reapply repellent. Always apply sunscreen first and then apply repellent
- take special care during peak mosquito biting hours. The mosquitoes that transmit diseases such as dengue, chikungunya and Zika will bite all through the day.
- remove potential mosquito breeding sites from around the home
- screen windows and doors
- take extra precautions when travelling in areas with a higher risk of mosquito-borne diseases
- stay and sleep in screened or air-conditioned rooms
- use a bed net if the area where you are sleeping is exposed to the outdoors. Nets are most effective when they are treated with a pyrethroid insecticide, such as permethrin. Pre-treated bed nets can be purchased before travelling, or nets can be treated after purchase
- avoid known areas of high mosquito-borne disease transmission or outbreaks.

For more detailed information on reducing the risk of mosquito bites at home and while travelling see the [Mosquitoes are a Health Hazard](#) fact sheet. This also includes more information on mosquito repellents.

See the [Staying healthy when travelling overseas](#) factsheet for further information on travel.

The [Smarttraveller website](#) also has health information for specific destinations.

How is chikungunya diagnosed?

Your doctor can take a blood sample and have it tested for chikungunya virus. A second blood test may be required to confirm a recent infection.

How is chikungunya treated?

There is no specific treatment for chikungunya. Your doctor will advise you on treating the symptoms with anti-inflammatory medications.

What is the public health response for chikungunya virus infections?

Laboratories notify their local public health unit when they confirm that someone has chikungunya virus. Public health units follow up each case to determine where the person may have been infected.

This information is important to help identify if transmission is occurring in areas considered to be low-risk. It also aims to prevent transmission in areas of Australia that have the type of mosquito that can spread chikungunya.

For further information on the public health response please call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055.

Related information

If you have symptoms of chikungunya and you are concerned, speak to your doctor right away, or in an emergency call Triple Zero (000).

For health advice you can also:

- call healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for free 24-hour health advice
- speak to your local pharmacist.