

What is dengue fever and how does it spread?

- Dengue fever is a virus that is spread to humans mainly by the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, but it is also spread by the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito, which can be found in the USA. At this time, neither type of mosquito is found in Canada.
- Dengue fever may spread through giving blood since the virus lives in the blood after the infection.
- There are four different strains of the virus, and you can be infected with more than one strain at the same time.
- Travellers are at highest risk in tropical/subtropical areas, e.g. Africa, eastern Mediterranean, Oceania, Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.
- Dengue fever is seldom fatal.
- Though a vaccine is presently in clinical trials, there is no medication or vaccine that protects against dengue fever at this time.

What are the signs and symptoms of dengue fever?

- Dengue fever is usually a mild illness that lasts up to one week; more than 7 out of 10 infected people do not have any symptoms.
- Others may develop flu-like symptoms 3 to 14 days after a bite from an infected mosquito that include sudden high fever along with at least two of the following: severe headache, pain behind the eyes, intense muscle/joint/bone pain (also called *break-bone fever*), rash, easy bruising and mild bleeding.
- Five percent of infected people develop dangerous complications called dengue hemorrhagic (bleeding) fever or dengue shock syndrome. It occurs more often in people who have had a different strain of the dengue virus before. If you start to feel worse within 24 hours after your fever goes down, go to the hospital immediately since it could be a serious medical emergency.

Who is at risk?

- Though everyone is at risk in dengue fever affected areas, anyone who has had dengue fever before has a higher risk of complications if they become infected with a different strain.
- The risk to travellers of severe reactions is lower because they have not likely been infected before, usually take precautions against mosquito bites and stay in air conditioned hotels where mosquito prevention measures are taken.
- Younger children, and those with their first dengue fever infection, usually have a milder illness than older children and adults over 65 years of age.

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How is dengue fever diagnosed?

- Diagnosis is based on level of risk, including travel location; accommodation; season (higher risk when it is warm); activities while travelling; signs and symptoms; and blood tests, including a rapid result blood test.
- Confirmation of a diagnosis with a blood test can be difficult if you have been infected before with a similar virus, such as Zika, Chikungunya or Yellow Fever.

What is the treatment for dengue fever?

- Supportive treatment includes plenty of fluids and rest, and avoiding mosquito bites to reduce spreading it to others. Take acetaminophen / Tylenol® for pain and / or fever.
- Do not use medication that contains acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), Naproxen or ibuprofen (NSAIDS), if you could be infected with dengue fever, as it may cause bleeding.
- If symptoms worsen, see your health care provider immediately.

How do I protect myself from dengue fever?

- Dengue fever infected mosquitoes are daytime biters, so it is important to prevent mosquito bites all day long, especially early morning and late afternoon, during the entire day if it is overcast, and after dark in well-lit areas or indoors, if they managed to get inside.
- Follow the Insect Precautions Fact Sheet.
- Insect repellents containing DEET and Picaridin are safe for pregnant and nursing women and children, if used as directed. Picaridin is preferred for children 6 mos to 12 yrs of age.
- If using both sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and the insect repellent at least 15 minutes later.

What else do I need to know?

- If there is a chance you could have the virus, use strict mosquito bite prevention measures to avoid spreading the disease to others, especially during the first week of illness.
- Canadian Blood Services advises you not to donate blood until 3 months after full recovery from dengue fever.
- If you have questions or concerns, consult with your health care provider for the most up-to-date advice.

Other Questions?

- Talk to your health care provider or call our Immunization Program at 613-966-5500
- Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013/2015
- Government of Canada. Jan. 2016
- Public Health Agency of Canada. 2014

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