

Living with Mosquitoes

MOSQUITOES AND DISEASE IN THE LOWER HUNTER & MID NORTH COAST

As well as causing nuisance biting problems, some mosquitoes also pose a public health risk in the Lower Hunter and Mid North Coast region. Mosquito-borne viruses (called arboviruses) can be transmitted by a number of different species in the local region and care should be taken to avoid mosquito bites, particularly when close to wetland and bushland areas.

While little is known about the natural history of Australian arboviruses, it is thought that native macropods (e.g. kangaroos and wallabies) and birds are the main reservoir hosts. Once a mosquito bites an infective animal, it takes approximately one week for the virus to spread through the body of the mosquito. When the mosquito then bites a human, the virus is transmitted in the saliva. Although Australian arboviruses can be transmitted by mosquitoes, other viruses such as influenza, hepatitis and HIV cannot be transmitted by mosquitoes.

The arboviruses most commonly causing human disease in the local region are:

Ross River virus

Ross River virus is the most common arbovirus in the local region. The severity of human disease symptoms can be variable, from rash and mild illness to acute symptoms which can include severe arthritis with aches and pains in the joints. Symptoms usually become evident between 7 and 10 days after being bitten by an infective mosquito and can last from a few days to several months. The majority of cases occur in summer and early autumn.

Barmah Forest virus

Barmah Forest virus is becoming increasingly common in the local region. The symptoms are very similar to Ross River virus infection but with more intense rash and less arthritic symptoms generally resulting from Barmah Forest infection.

