

Chikungunya factsheet

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?

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 a person who has chikungunya virus in their blood. Once infected, the virus multiplies inside the mosquito and can infect other people when the mosquito 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 approved in Australia.

To prevent mosquito bites, take these steps:

- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts, long trousers and enclosed shoes. Mosquitoes can bite through tight clothing.
- Apply mosquito repellent containing picaridin, DEET or oil of lemon eucalyptus, evenly to all areas of exposed skin. 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. Some species of mosquitoes will bite all throughout the day.
- Remove stagnant water around the home as they can become mosquito breeding sites.
- Use mosquito nets, and screen windows and doors.
- Take extra precautions when travelling in areas with a higher risk of mosquito-borne diseases.

In addition to the general protection measures above, when travelling overseas you should also:

- Stay and sleep in screened or air-conditioned rooms.
- Use a mosquito bed net if the sleeping area is exposed to the outdoors. Effective nets 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 mosquito bite prevention information, see the [Mosquitoes are a Health Hazard factsheet](#). The [Smartraveller 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?

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.

Additional resources

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 further advice:

- See [Mosquitoes are a health hazard Factsheet](#) and [Staying safe and healthy overseas](#)
- call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055
- call Healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for free 24-hour health advice
- speak to your local pharmacist.