



Health
Murrumbidgee
Local Health Network

Barmah Forest virus alert – information for General Practitioners

Please distribute this information to all clinical staff in your practice

Key points for GPs

- 1. There has been a recent increase in Barmah Forest infections in some parts of NSW including the Riverina, Murray regions.**
- 2. Suspect the infection in anyone presenting with fever, arthralgia and rash, especially if there's a history of recent mosquito bites.**
- 3. Treatment is supportive.**

There is currently an increased risk of Barmah Forest virus infection in many parts of NSW, including inland areas. Barmah Forest virus is transmitted by infected mosquitoes. Barmah Forest virus has recently been detected in mosquitoes collected from a number of sites in NSW and increased human cases are now being notified to NSW public health units.

Mosquitoes are especially prevalent following recent rains and hot weather and other arboviral illnesses may also increase in coming weeks (especially Ross River virus and possibly even Murray Valley Encephalitis).

Clinical presentation of Barmah Forest virus (BFV) infection

- Classical features include fever, headache, widespread florid rash, polyarthritis (especially of ankles, fingers, knees, and wrists), myalgia and fatigue.
- Many have mild or subclinical infection.
- Symptoms typically resolve within weeks but joint pain and fatigue can last for months.
- Barmah Forest virus infection and Ross River virus infection can be difficult to distinguish clinically.

Diagnosis

- Serology is diagnostic. Acute and convalescent samples should be taken.
- Barmah forest virus infections are notifiable by laboratories under the Public Health Act

Treatment

- Symptomatic only.

Prevention

Prevention of infection is through prevention of mosquito bites. People should:

- Avoid being outdoors at peak mosquito activity times (dawn and dusk) if possible.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET or picaridin to all exposed areas of the skin and reapply repellent regularly.
- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts and pants when outside.
- Ensure that doors and windows have intact flyscreens.
- Check homes regularly for potential mosquito breeding sites and remove these (eg. any uncovered water containers, wading pools, old tyres, pot plants).

More information

A Barmah Forest virus factsheet is available at:

www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/barmah_forest_virus.html

Please contact the public health unit for more information.

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