

March flies and their medical importance

About March flies

March flies are also known as horse flies or tabanids, with about 200 species known to occur in Australia. They can be a serious pest of both humans and animals, with the females inflicting a painful bite to take a blood meal in order to produce eggs.

March flies occur in various habitats, and are known to breed in damp soil, rotting vegetation, sand and tree holes. The life cycle of the different March fly species varies, but the adults generally live for 3-4 weeks. They are most active during daytime.

Medical conditions triggered by March flies in the NT

While March flies are not known to transmit disease in Australia, their bite can trigger adverse allergic reactions. In the Top End of the NT, one species (*Pseudotabanus trypherus*) is known to cause serious medical symptoms in some people, including hives, fever, wheezing and in severe cases anaphylactic shock. Allergic reactions are a response to proteins in the March fly's saliva, injected while biting.

Scratching of bites can also lead to secondary skin infection. To relief the symptoms, ice packs can be applied to the bite.

Mild antihistamines can also provide some relief to painful bites. In case of a severe allergic reaction, urgent medical attention should be sought immediately.

March fly bite prevention

There are no control measures using insecticides for March flies that are effective, due to their extensive breeding areas and long distance flight range. Personal protection measures are the best way to avoid being bitten.

Personal protection measures

- Use protective clothing in outdoor situations. Loose-fitting and light-coloured shirts and long pants are best, as March flies are attracted to dark colours.
- Use personal repellents containing DEET, picaridin or extract of lemon eucalyptus (PMD) on areas of exposed skin in combination with protective clothing.
- Personal repellent lotions and gels are more effective and longer lasting than sprays.

Further information

Read more about other insects of medical importance at [NT Health](#).

Contact

For more information on March flies contact Medical Entomology at the [Centre for Disease Control](#) on 8922 8901 or, visit the Medical Entomology web page at [NT Health](#).

Location	Address	Phone	Fax	Email
Darwin	Ground Floor, Building 4 Royal Darwin Hospital Rocklands Drive Tiwi NT 0810	(08) 8922 8044 1800 008 002	(08) 8922 8310	CDCSurveillance.DARWIN@nt.gov.au
Katherine	O'Keefe House Katherine Hospital Gorge Road Katherine NT 0850	(08) 8973 9049	(08) 8973 9048	CDC.Katherine@nt.gov.au
Tennant Creek	Schmidt Street Tennant Creek NT 0860	(08) 8962 4259	(08) 8962 4420	CDC.Barkly@nt.gov.au
Alice Springs	Disease Control Unit Lower Ground Floor Eurilpa House, 25 Todd Street Alice Springs NT 0870	(08) 8951 7540	(08) 8951 7900	CDC.alicesprings@nt.gov.au
Nhulunbuy	Corner Mathew Flinders Way and Chesterfield Court Nhulunbuy NT 0880	(08) 8987 0357	(08) 8987 0500	CDCGove.DoH@nt.gov.au