

05 May 2023

Health Alert: Confirmed case of Murray Valley encephalitis in the Big Rivers Region

Dear Colleague,

Health staff are advised to consider **Murray Valley Encephalitis (MVE)** virus. This week a case of MVE was confirmed in a resident of a Big Rivers community, which is the third MVE case notified in the NT since February this year. MVE virus has also been recently detected in mosquitoes in the Top End and in Central Australia. Historically the NT has about 1 case per year.

MVE is a rare disease, with between 1 in 200-1000 people bitten by an infected mosquito becoming seriously unwell. However, up to 30% of encephalitic patients will die, and up to 50% will experience long-term neurologic sequelae. Signs and symptoms usually appear 5 to 28 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito (usually the common banded mosquito *Culex annulirostris*).

Presenting features include:

- Headache
- Fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle aches
- Confusion which can progress to drowsiness
- Tremors, ataxia, weakness
- Seizures or fits
- Delirium and coma (severe cases).

Suspect cases should be referred to hospital. Treatment is mainly supportive and often requires intensive care. The presentation can be similar to Japanese encephalitis, another mosquito borne disease currently active in the NT, for which there is a vaccination program for NT residents living or working in areas at risk (see [Japanese encephalitis vaccine](#) page for eligibility information).

The only way to prevent MVE is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. MVE is a notifiable disease in the NT.

For more information about the diagnosis, case management and the public health response, see the Murray Valley Encephalitis Virus – National Guidelines for Public Health Units.

[Murray Valley encephalitis virus – CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

Further information from the NT can be found [here](#) as well as advice on [protecting yourself against mosquitoes](#).

Yours sincerely,

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