

Dengue fever

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The Disease

Dengue or "break-bone" fever is a viral disease which can be severe. There are four different strains. It is found in most tropical and sub-tropical regions.

Transmission

Dengue is transmitted to people via the bite of infected mosquitoes. Dengue mosquitoes, primarily *Aedes aegypti* but also *Aedes albopictus*, prefer to live in or near human habitations and bite during the day. Transmission from mother to child is possible during pregnancy or birth.

Symptoms

Some people do not develop symptoms. If symptoms occur, they usually start four to ten days after an infected mosquito bites and include high fever, severe headaches, aching pain behind eyes, joint and muscle pain, nausea and vomiting. A rash often follows. Most people recover within two weeks, although some may experience fatigue for several more weeks. Sometimes a potentially fatal form of the disease with bleeding and organ failure can develop (known as "severe dengue", previously called dengue haemorrhagic fever or DHF). People who have had dengue in the past and are re-infected with a different strain of dengue are at higher risk of severe dengue, as are infants and pregnant women. Dengue in pregnancy carries a risk of pre-term birth, low birth weight and foetal distress.

Diagnosis

Blood tests are required to make a diagnosis.

Treatment

Although there is no specific treatment for dengue, maintaining hydration and preventing bleeding is very important. Symptoms such as fever and headache can be managed with paracetamol (acetaminophen). Aspirin and "non-steroidal anti-inflammatory" medication such as ibuprofen should be avoided as they can increase the risk of bleeding. Hospitalisation is required for severe illness. Early recognition and management of potentially severe disease improve survival.

Prevention

Prevention is through avoiding mosquito bites [\[download PDF\]](#).

Vaccination is available in some countries. Eligibility and recommendations vary.

Removing mosquito breeding sites helps reduce the overall mosquito population. Authorities encourage people living in dengue-risk areas to eliminate standing water around their homes by covering any water containers and getting rid of unnecessary items that can collect water.

Risk to Travellers

Dengue is present in most tropical countries of the Western Pacific, Asia, the Caribbean, the Americas and Africa. Epidemics are becoming increasingly common due to the urbanisation of rural areas. Cases of dengue fever are confirmed every year in international travellers visiting risk areas. The risk of acquiring dengue is highest in the hours after sunrise and before sunset.

Further Information

[View the 1 minute Dengue Video Podcast \(Vimeo\)](#)
[WHO dengue information](#)
[CDC dengue information](#)

Disclaimer

This information has been developed for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Should you have questions or concerns about any topic described here, please consult your healthcare professional.