

DENGUE FEVER

What is dengue fever?

Dengue fever is a serious illness that occurs in tropical and sub-tropical regions around the world, mainly in populated areas. It is caused by the dengue virus and is spread by infected mosquitoes. Roughly 100 million cases of dengue fever occur worldwide each year.

Dengue fever rarely causes death, and many people have no symptoms or experience only mild illness. A more severe and sometimes fatal complication of this disease is called dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF). DHF causes extreme hemorrhage (bleeding), shock (organ failure) and even death. Once someone has recovered from dengue fever, they will have lifelong immunity against that virus. However, they may still be susceptible to a subsequent infection from the other three subtypes of dengue fever.

What are the symptoms of dengue fever?

Symptoms of dengue fever will develop three to 14 days following infection with the virus. It begins with a sudden, high fever, a severe headache and tremendous pain in the muscles and joints. A measles-like rash may also appear three to five days after the onset of the fever.

Symptoms can worsen significantly within hours. Severe dengue fever is a medical emergency. About one in 20 people who get sick with dengue fever will develop severe dengue which can result in shock, internal bleeding and death.

Seek medical attention immediately if you or a family member have any of the following signs and symptoms:

- Bruising and bleeding from the nose or gums
- Persistent vomiting
- Severe abdominal pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Blood in vomit or stool
- Pale and cold skin

People who have recovered from dengue fever may feel tired for several weeks. Individuals who are infected for the second time are at greater risk of severe dengue, such as DHF.

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How does dengue fever spread?

The dengue virus is spread through the bite of an infected female Aedes mosquito. These mosquitoes get the virus while feeding on the blood of an infected person. The infected mosquitoes spread the virus through their bite to other vulnerable people.

How can dengue fever be prevented?

There is no vaccine available against dengue fever. The best prevention is to minimize the risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito. People who live in or are traveling to regions where dengue fever may be a threat can prevent the disease by practicing the following precautions:

- Protect your skin by wearing clothing that covers arms and legs
- Where possible, stay in well-screened areas and select accommodations with well-screened windows and/or air conditioning
- Sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets if staying in areas without screened windows or air conditioning. Ensure they are tucked underneath the mattress
- Use an insect repellent that contains DEET or other approved ingredients
- Avoid wearing perfumes and using shampoo or soap that is high in perfume
- Empty, clean or cover any standing water, such as old tires, metal drums and flower pots

How is dengue fever treated?

There is no specific treatment for dengue fever. Travellers who develop flu-like illness within two weeks after returning from areas where dengue fever occurs should promptly see their doctor and do the following:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever and pain
- Avoid non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, like Advil and Aspirin. Aspirin can increase the risk of bleeding
- Watch for severe symptoms and contact your doctor as soon as possible