



Frequently Asked Questions about Dengue Fever

What is dengue?

Dengue (pronounced den' gee) is a disease caused by any one of four closely related dengue viruses (DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, or DENV-4). The viruses are transmitted to humans by the bite of a mosquito that is infected with dengue virus. Mosquitoes become infected with dengue virus by biting and taking a blood meal from a human who has dengue virus in their blood. Dengue infections are common and widespread in many tropical countries of the South Pacific, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Africa. Dengue virus is related to West Nile Virus and St. Louis Encephalitis virus.

What are the symptoms of dengue?

The most common symptoms of dengue fever are high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, joint pain, bone or muscle pain, rash, and nausea and vomiting. Many times, younger children and those with their first dengue infection have a milder illness than older children and adults. Many people infected with dengue virus do not develop any symptoms, so a blood test is needed to know if you had dengue or not. People with chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, or congestive heart failure may be at increased risk of severe disease.

What is dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF)?

DHF is a more severe form of dengue that develops in only a small percentage of cases. Symptoms include fever and bleeding problems. DHF can be fatal if not properly treated in a timely manner. Those who have been previously infected with a different strain of dengue may be more likely to develop DHF.

How common is dengue?

Dengue infections have become more common in recent years. Up to 100 million cases occur every year worldwide in countries throughout the tropics and subtropics. In the United States, most cases of dengue fever have been linked to the patients' travel to countries that have dengue cases reported throughout the year, every year. Several sporadic outbreaks have occurred in south Texas since the 1980s.

Can I get dengue in Florida?

A number of cases of dengue are reported in Florida each year in immigrants and travelers to tropical areas. During the summer and fall of 2009, a number of cases of locally-acquired dengue were reported in Key West, Florida. These were the first locally acquired cases of dengue fever reported in more than 40 years in the state. The risk of getting dengue in Florida is considered very low. The mosquito that transmits dengue virus is found in Florida and across the southeastern United States, but the risk of transmission may be reduced in this country by the widespread use of air conditioning and screened windows and doors, as well as statewide mosquito control efforts.

How do I prevent dengue?

There is no vaccine to protect against dengue. The best way to prevent dengue is to avoid mosquito bites. The mosquito that transmits dengue prefers to live near humans, in our houses and on our patios. .

- Use a mosquito repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535. Always read label directions carefully for the approved usage before applying a repellent.
- Wear clothes that cover your skin.
- Check all screen doors and windows on your home and repair as necessary.
- Remove standing water and empty and clean all water holding containers around your home. The mosquito that transmits dengue may lay eggs in vegetation or containers around your home. The eggs develop into flying mosquitoes within about one week.
 - Remove water from old tires, buckets, garbage cans, and containers where water collects. Keep lids or covers on to prevent mosquito from laying eggs in the container.
 - Check clogged gutters and flat roofs that may have poor drainage.
 - Fill in holes or dips in the ground that collect water. Level the ground around your home so water can run off.
 - Empty and clean birdbaths, animal water bowls, plant pots, and children's wading pools at least once a week.
 - Store boats upside down or with a cover.
- Notify mosquito control if you notice a large number of mosquitoes around your house.

What do I do if I think I have dengue?

Advise your healthcare provider of any dengue-like illness with fever occurring within 2 weeks of leaving a tropical country. If you live in Key West, call your healthcare provider if you have a fever for 2 to 7 days and a dengue-like illness with symptoms such as severe headache, severe joint or body pain, pain behind the eyes, rash, or unusual bleeding. Dengue infections are diagnosed by a blood test. There is no specific medication for treatment of dengue, but it can be effectively treated with supportive care.

Is the Department of Health (DOH) doing anything about dengue?

DOH has a program dedicated to mosquito-borne diseases. Cases of dengue are reported to county health departments by physicians and these cases are investigated thoroughly. The local mosquito control district is notified if there is any risk of transmission to others. Other mosquito-borne disease surveillance methods such as the use of sentinel chickens and veterinary reporting of disease are not useful for dengue but can provide information about related illnesses like West Nile Virus illness, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and St. Louis encephalitis.