

MVE disease warning for the Top End

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A case of the potentially-fatal disease Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) in the Greater Darwin area has highlighted the importance of taking precautions against mosquito-borne diseases.

“Mosquito numbers are high in some areas of the Top End and we are extending our warning for another month until the end of July,” Dr Peter Markey, of the Centre for Disease Control, said today.

“It is very important for anyone who lives in or is visiting areas that are prone to mosquito activity to avoid being bitten.

“People are advised to wear protective, light-coloured clothing with long sleeves, long trousers and socks between dusk and dawn, use mosquito-proof tents when camping and to choose protective repellent containing diethyl-toluamide (DEET) or picaridin when outside in mosquito-prone areas.

“Campers should be particularly careful, and parents need to make sure babies and children are well protected.”

Dr Markey says Murray Valley encephalitis is one of a number of mosquito-borne diseases that are endemic in the Northern Territory.

“The main vector for MVE is the common banded mosquito, *Culex annulirostris*, which is most active after sundown,” he said.

“At this time of year, this species can occur in high numbers in the Top End within five kilometres of large coastal and sub-coastal flood plains and swamps and in seasonally-flooded coastal and inland areas associated with creeks and rivers.”

Murray Valley encephalitis is the most dangerous endemic mosquito-borne disease in the NT, Dr Markey said.

Usual MVE symptoms include severe headache, high fever, drowsiness, tremor and seizures, especially in young children. In some cases, the condition progresses to delirium and coma, leading to paralysis or brain damage.

Despite the best care, 25 per cent of people die from the infection and at least 25 per cent will have residual neurological effects.

“A number of very simple precautions can protect against this very serious disease,” Dr Markey said.

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