



MEDIA RELEASE

24 December 2004

Rain encourages breeding ground for mozzies

Pools of stagnant water from recent rain have turned many backyards into the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes.

South Western Sydney Area Health Service public health physician Dr Leon Heron warns any still or stagnant water around the home can encourage mosquitoes to breed and increase the chance of people being bitten and possibly contracting a nasty mosquito-borne disease.

“Mosquitoes love to breed in places such as ground pools, gutters and containers,” he said.

“We’ve had quite a bit of rain in last month but with the summer sun now making more of an appearance, it’s time to clean up around the home to ensure you aren’t providing a breeding ground for mozzies.”

Dr Heron said it only takes two to three weeks to produce large numbers of mature mosquitoes.

He suggests the following tips to minimise the chances of a mosquito breeding ground around the home:

- Remove all water-holding rubbish from around the yard
- Regularly flush out potplant bases
- Keep guttering clear
- Mow lawns regularly and clear vegetation areas of moist, tangled undergrowth
- Make sure openings of septic tanks and water tanks are covered and screened securely.

If you live on a farm or a large property, mosquitoes can breed in a number of places. In this case it’s a good idea to:

- Keep dams and ground pools free of vegetation
- Check dam walls and irrigation bays for water leaks
- Be careful not to over-irrigate, to avoid water collecting in low lying areas for long periods of time
- Don’t let irrigation water flow into and lie undisturbed in roadside table drains.

Other natural mosquito breeding sites include coastal estuaries and areas near rivers, dams and lakes.

Dr Heron said most mosquito bites were harmless, causing nothing more than a small lump and an irritating itch. However, some mosquitos can transfer unpleasant infections such as the Ross River Virus and the related Barmah Forest Virus.

“Symptoms for Ross River Virus and Barmah Forest Virus are similar. They include arthritis of small joints, tiredness, headaches, rash and fever. These diseases are not fatal, but can cause severe, persistent and debilitating symptoms,” he said.

These diseases can be contracted by anyone. Both are common, with over 1000 cases reported in some years, mainly from December through to May, though it is likely that many more cases go unreported.

“The best way to protect you and your family against these diseases is to avoid bites,” Dr Heron said.

Important preventive measures include:

- Protecting your skin from bites by covering up with long sleeves, pants and socks
- Use insect repellents on any exposed skin. The best repellents contain the chemical ingredients DEET or picaridin
- Ensure all doors and windows are fitted with flyscreens
- When camping or on holidays, make sure your accommodation, including your tent, has flyscreening which is in good condition.

Issued by South Western Sydney Area Health Service Public Affairs, contact Maree Spry 9828 6848 for further information.