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Health warning to avoid mosquitoes

NSW Health is urging people to take extra precautions to protect themselves against mosquito bites and acquiring a mosquito-borne disease.

Dr David Durrheim, public health physician Hunter New England Health said that the Kunjin virus has been detected in horses in a range of locations in Southern and Northern NSW, including the Hunter Valley, indicating that Kunjin may be circulating in mosquitoes and this virus has potential to cause human infection.

“It is important to be vigilant about protecting yourself from mosquito bites as mosquitoes can spread Kunjin and Murray Valley encephalitis viruses,” Dr Durrheim said.

Kunjin and Murray Valley encephalitis virus infection are two rare but serious infections of the brain which can cause symptoms such as severe headache, neck stiffness, sensitivity to bright lights, drowsiness, confusion and possible seizures (fits).

“There is no vaccine and no specific treatment for these viruses. The best way to avoid infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes,” Dr Durrheim said.

Simple actions to avoid mosquito bites include:

- When outside cover up as much as possible with light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and covered footwear.
- Use an effective insect repellent on exposed skin. Reapply repellent within a few hours, as protection wears off with perspiration. The best mosquito repellents contain Diethyl Toluamide (DEET), Picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Use insecticide sprays, vapour dispensing units (indoors) and mosquito coils (outdoors) to clear rooms or repel mosquitoes from an area.
- Cover all windows, doors, vents and other entrances with insect screens.
- Remove any water-holding containers outside the house where mosquitoes could breed.

For further information on mosquito-borne disease and ways to protect yourself go to:
www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/pests/vector/Pages/resources.aspx

Fact sheets on specific mosquito-borne diseases, including Murray Valley encephalitis and Kunjin virus, are available at:
www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/pests/vector/Pages/factsheets.aspx