

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Minister for Ambulance Services



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STAYING SAFE FROM MOSQUITO-BORNE DISEASES THIS SUMMER

The Allan Labor Government is urging Victorians to be proactive in protecting themselves from mosquito-borne diseases this season, with warm weather elevating the risk of transmission in a number of regions across the state.

Inspecting the mosquito surveillance program at LaTrobe University's AgriBio Centre for AgriBioscience, Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas said preparation is the key to staying safe.

A joint initiative between the Government and the university, one of the centre's functions is to analyse samples from 60 traps across Victoria to identify mosquito-borne diseases – a task undertaken each week during the mosquito breeding season, between November to late April.

Following last season's heavy rain and flooding, particularly across parts of northern Victoria, conditions have created an ideal environment for disease in the mosquito population – with critical surveillance work highlighting the risk of illness could be higher than normal this mosquito season.

Mosquito-borne diseases cannot spread from person to person and most cases will be mild, but for some people, transmission can lead to severe and long-term health complications.

These complications are worsened if a mosquito is carrying Japanese encephalitis, Murray Valley encephalitis, Ross River, Barmah Forest, and West Nile viruses.

Simple and practical steps that Victorians can undertake to reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes, include:

1. Covering up by wearing long, loose-fitting clothing – mosquitos can bite through tight clothing
2. Using mosquito repellents containing Picaridin or DEET on all exposed skin
3. Checking the repellent label before applying to children – spraying or rubbing repellent on children's clothes is recommended, avoiding their skin especially their hands
4. Limiting outdoor activity if there is a significant uptick in mosquitoes and using 'knockdown' fly spray, mosquito coils or plug-in repellent while sitting or eating outdoors
5. Removing stagnant water where mosquitoes can breed around the home or a campsite
6. Making sure accommodation is fitted with mosquito netting or screens while on holiday

Victorians in high-risk local government areas are also eligible for the Japanese encephalitis vaccines – available at GPs, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, community pharmacies and local councils.

More information is available on the Better Health Channel and Department of Health website.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"As we spend more time in Victoria's great outdoors this summer, it's vital to be aware of the risks associated with mosquito-borne disease and how to prevent transmission, including vaccination and regularly applying repellent."

"The hardworking team at AgriBio play a critical role in forecasting mosquito seasons, helping our health experts provide an early warning to protect Victorians."

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence

"AgriBio is a world class facility proudly backed by the Labor Government – its leading agricultural bioscience research, including mosquito surveillance, is making a real difference right across Victoria."

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High risk local government areas for mosquito-borne diseases and where residents are eligible for the Japanese encephalitis vaccine include:

- Benalla
- Campaspe
- Greater Bendigo
- Hindmarsh
- Indigo
- Mildura
- Northern Grampians
- Swan Hill
- Wangaratta
- Wodonga
- Buloke
- Gannawarra
- Greater Shepparton
- Horsham
- Loddon
- Moira
- Strathbogie
- Towong
- West Wimmera
- Yarriambiack