

Frequently Asked Questions

What is dengue?

Dengue (den-gee) is a viral disease spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. There are four types of dengue viruses, and the disease occurs in most tropical areas of the world. The disease used to be called “breakbone fever” because it causes severe joint and muscle pain that feels like bones are breaking. Most U.S. cases occur in travelers returning from abroad. Dengue hemorrhagic fever is a more severe form of dengue.

Who gets dengue?

Anyone can get infected with dengue when traveling to areas where mosquitoes carry the disease. The virus can affect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito. Dengue is not passed from person to person.

Where is dengue?

The disease occurs mostly in tropical and subtropical areas, including the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

What are the symptoms of dengue?

Symptoms usually occur within four to seven days after getting bitten by an infected mosquito and may include:

- Sudden high fever
- Severe headache
- Eye pain
- Backache
- Skin rash on the feet or legs
- Nausea, vomiting, upset stomach and loss of appetite are also common

Younger children have a milder illness than older children and adults. Dengue hemorrhagic fever is a more severe form of the disease and includes a fever that lasts from 2 to 7 days. Skin bruises easily and blood vessels may leak, causing bleeding from the nose, mouth and gums. Without prompt treatment, blood vessels may cave in, and cause shock (dengue shock syndrome).

How is dengue diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects dengue, they will observe the patient’s symptoms and examine samples of the patient’s blood.

What is the treatment for dengue?

There is no specific medication for the treatment of dengue. People with dengue should rest and drink plenty of fluids. If dengue is suspected, use analgesics (pain relievers) with acetaminophen and avoid those with aspirin.

Dengue hemorrhagic fever is treated by replacing lost fluids. Some people need blood transfusions to control bleeding.

How can dengue be prevented?

Since most cases of dengue in New Jersey come from people who have traveled to areas where the disease is present, the best way to prevent dengue is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes when traveling in areas with high rates of the disease. There is no vaccine to prevent dengue.

Follow these steps to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors at dusk or dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent such as those with DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. These products can be used on skin or clothing. Choose a product that provides protection for the amount of time spent outdoors. Permethrin is another type of insect repellent. It can only be used on clothing. ALWAYS follow the directions on the product label.
- Sleep in screened-in areas or under protective nets.

Mosquitoes begin to breed in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than four days. Get rid of mosquito breeding sites around the home.

- Clean out gutters and drains
- Dispose of old tires
- Drain standing water from pool covers and ditches
- Remove all containers that hold water
- Maintain pools, spas and saunas properly
- Change birdbath water every several days
- Make sure all windows and doors have screens and that all screens are in good condition.

Where can I get more information on dengue?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health <http://www.nj.gov/health>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/dengue>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional.

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Revised 10/18