

DENGUE FEVER

Dengue [DEN-ghee] is a flu-like viral disease spread by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito and occurs in most tropical areas of the world. Unlike the mosquitoes that cause malaria, dengue mosquitoes bite during the day and can be recognised by their black and white striped body. The time between the bite of a mosquito carrying the dengue virus and the start of symptoms averages between 4 to 6 days, with a range of 3 to 14 days. An infected person cannot spread the infection to other persons but can be a source of dengue virus for mosquitoes for about 6 days.

How is dengue diagnosed?

Dengue is diagnosed by a blood test.

Symptoms

Infection with the dengue virus may be sub-clinical (no apparent symptoms) or may cause illness ranging from a mild fever to a severe, even fatal condition, i.e. dengue haemorrhagic fever or dengue shock syndrome. The symptoms last approximately one week. Some people may experience a resurgence of fever and other symptoms that may last another 2-3 days. Symptoms are most commonly seen in adults and older children. Young children may show no symptoms.

Typical symptoms may include:

- sudden onset of fever (lasting three to seven days)
- intense headache (especially behind the eyes)
- muscle and joint pain (ankles, knees and elbows)
- unpleasant metallic taste in mouth, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain
- flushed skin on face and neck, fine skin rash as fever subsides
- rash on arms and legs, severe itching, peeling of skin and hair loss
- minor bleeding (nose or gums) and heavy menstrual periods
- extreme fatigue

Dengue fever treatment

- See a doctor immediately.
- Wear insect repellent. If you have dengue fever, mosquitoes that bite you may pass dengue on to other people.
- Drink plenty of liquids and take paracetamol for fever and pain. Do not take aspirin because it can affect blood clotting.
- Dengue hemorrhagic fever is treated by replacing lost fluids.

Types of dengue

There are four types of dengue viruses that cause dengue fever worldwide - Dengue 1, 2, 3 and 4. A person infected with one type of dengue will subsequently only be immune to that type. They will not be immuned to other types of dengue and will, in fact, be at risk of developing severe symptoms if they contract another type of dengue.