

What is Barmah Forest Virus?

Barmah Forest Virus is a viral disease that is transmitted to humans through mosquito bites. People with mild cases usually recover in a month or so, but symptoms may persist for longer.

What are the symptoms of Barmah Forest Virus?

The illness often begins with mild 'flu-like symptoms. Arthritis in large and small joints, joint stiffness and swelling, fever, lethargy, fatigue, headache, night sweats, nausea, muscle tenderness and pain, dizziness and light-headedness—any of these may be present, with or without a prominent rash. Joint pain and fatigue may last up to 6 months. The condition is very similar to Ross River Virus, although generally of shorter duration.

Who can get Barmah Forest Virus?

The infection is unique to Australia where anyone bitten by certain mosquitoes is at risk of acquiring it. Infections tend to be more common in northern Australia and among people aged 35 to 65. Cases occur mainly in the warmer months, a time of peak mosquito activity.

What is the incubation period for Barmah Forest Virus?

Usually 7–9 days from the bite to the development of symptoms.

How long is a person infectious?

Immunity develops after initial infection, but there may be a very short period of time when a mosquito can pick up the virus from one person and transfer it to another, or to an animal.

How is Barmah Forest Virus transmitted?

A mosquito that bites an infected animal or infected person transmits the virus by biting another person or animal. It cannot be passed directly from person to person. Reservoir animals include possums and kangaroos.

What can be done to prevent infection?

Around the home, get rid of water-holding containers as these provide mosquito breeding sites—ponds, blocked gutters, old tyres, pot plant saucers, etc—and screen all windows and doors. Take personal precautions such as staying indoors around dusk and dawn, wearing light-coloured clothing that covers the arms and legs, and using an insect repellent that contains at least 20% of diethyl toluamide (DEET).

How is Barmah Forest Virus treated?

There is no specific treatment for Barmah Forest Virus, and no vaccine available. Symptoms may be alleviated through the use of analgesics (for pain and fevers) and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents (for arthritic symptoms).

Does the immunity cover other mosquito-borne viruses?

Infection with Barmah Forest Virus does not provide any protection from other mosquito borne viruses (e.g. Ross River Virus, Dengue fever, Murray Valley Encephalitis and Kunjin Virus).

Serological diagnosis:

Barmah Forest Virus IgM may cross react with other infections and/or may remain positive for months or years after infection, so repeat testing to confirm a positive test is important.