

Fact sheet

What is Chikungunya fever?

Chikungunya fever, is a viral illness transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. The illness resembles dengue fever. As it usually co-occurs with dengue fever, it is often misdiagnosed. Hence the number of cases of chikungunya fever would be much higher than that reported.

Clinical features

The symptoms of chikungunya fever include a sudden onset of fever; severe headache; chills; nausea; vomiting, and joint pain. The disease is characterized by severe, sometimes persistent joint pains, and is generally not fatal. Some patients have reported incapacitating joint pain or arthritis which may last for weeks or months. The areas around the joints become swollen and painful to the touch. However, such prolonged joint pain and fatigue, usually associated with chikungunya fever are not typical symptoms of dengue. A rash may sometimes occur but a haemorrhaging is rare.

Incubation period

Time from the infected bite to the onset of illness can be 2-12 days, but is usually three-seven days. However, "silent" infections or infections without symptoms do occur though it is still unknown how often.

Treatment

If you suspect having symptoms of chikungunya fever, you must report this to your family physician or to the nearest health centre.

Currently there is no specific drug treatment against chikungunya fever. However proper and early treatment with bed rest and sufficient intake of fluids is recommended. Aspirin and ibuprofen should be avoided as they are known to increase the risk of bleeding. Paracetamol can be given on medical advice.

How does it spread?

Aedes mosquitoes, which are highly domestic in the rural, urban and periurban areas are vectors of this disease. **They bite during the day** and are easily recognized by the black and white stripes/spot markings on their bodies and legs. They breed easily in anything which can hold clean water including tyres, coconut shells, flower pots, storage jars and cooling systems. The eggs become adults within a span of 7-10 days. The mosquito can rest inside, outside and around the house, school and other areas in towns and villages where it is dark, cool and shaded.

Prevention

Since specific drug treatment and vaccines are not available, all central efforts should be directed against mosquitoes. It is important to eliminate their breeding grounds in order to control the disease. However, efforts should be intensified before the transmission season especially during and after the rainy season and at the time of the epidemic.

Prevent mosquito bites

In order to avoid mosquito bites:

- Wear full-sleeve clothes and long dresses to cover the limbs;
- Use repellents – care should be taken in using repellents on small children and the elderly.
- Use mosquito coils, repellents and electric vapour mats during daytime;
- Use mosquito nets – to protect babies, old people and others, who may rest during the day. The effectiveness of such nets can be improved by treating them with insecticides. Curtains (cloth or bamboo) can also be treated with insecticides and hung at windows or doorways, to repel or kill mosquitoes.

Protection from sick people having chikungunya fever- mosquitoes become infected when they bite people who are sick with chikungunya fever. Mosquito nets and mosquito coils will effectively prevent mosquitoes from biting sick people and help stop the spread of chikungunya fever.

Prevent breeding of mosquitoes

Every week

Inspect the interior and exterior of the home and its surrounding areas.

- Drain tanks, barrels, drums and buckets, animal water troughs, water storage vessels, plastic food containers, used coconut shells and cooler before refilling, etc.
- Empty coolers when not in use.
- Change water in flower vases.
- Scrub the inside of vases to remove mosquito eggs.
- Remove water in plant pot plates.
- Scrub the plate thoroughly to remove mosquito eggs.
- Clear fallen leaves and stagnant water in drains and garden. Some leaves can collect water.

Once a month

- Add prescribed amounts of sand granular insecticide (Temephos, 1 part per million) to containers, vases, gully traps and roof gutters, even if they are dry. (Caution: Do not add the chemical to drinking water. Keep it out of reach of children).
- Clear away leaves in roof gutters and apron drains where feasible.

At all times

- Turn pails and watering cans over and store them under shelter. Place/ store all articles that can collect rainwater under shelter at all times.
- Cover rarely used gully traps. If possible, replace gully trap covers with non-perforated ones and install anti-mosquito valves.
- Do not litter. Paper cups and water bottles thrown indiscriminately into drains, grass verges, roadside, vacant lands and other public places can collect rainwater and help mosquitoes breed.

Roles of community:

- Resident welfare associations and village chiefs should reinforce anti-mosquito breeding campaigns especially before the transmission period, and
- Schools and religious groups should be used to convey simple messages to the community on ways to prevent the illness.

For more information go to:

<http://www.searo.who.int/en/Section10/section2246.htm>