

(EPIDEMIC POLYARTHRITIS)

Epidemic polyarthrititis is caused by a virus which is transmitted by some species of mosquitoes. It is also known as Ross river virus infection.

SYMPTOMS

Flu like symptoms are common, and include pains in muscles, joints and tendons, sweating, headache, aches and fever. Some parts of the body may be painful to touch and you might notice swelling in some joints. You could also experience joints stiffness, particularly early in the morning.

A rash occurs in many people, usually on the trunk or limbs, although it can occur elsewhere. It will usually resolve in 7 to 10 days. You might also notice a few small purple blotches which look like bruises or small lumps just under the skin, although they should cause no discomfort.

On some days you might feel tired, weak, unable to concentrate, and generally out of sorts or ~~blown~~. School or work performance can be affected. It may be important to inform teachers or employers of these effects.

After a few weeks most of these symptoms will disappear. However, Ross River virus is an unusual illness in that some of the symptoms may return for periods of time, even, after the virus is gone. These include the aches, pains, stiffness, and swellings referred to earlier.

These symptoms are an indication that the recovery process for Ross River virus can take longer in some people than for most other viral infections. The symptoms can occur on and off for some time, and full recovery can take several months. A small percentage of persons may take more than a year to fully recover. The severity of the symptoms will usually decrease each time they occur, and you will eventually recover fully.

BLOOD TESTS

At least one blood test, and often a second taken a week later are necessary to confirm that you have been infected with Ross River virus. Other tests are often needed to exclude illnesses with similar symptoms, especially rubella if the patient or close acquaintance is pregnant.

TREATMENT

Antibiotics are not effective against the virus. However, the symptoms can be treated effectively. Your doctor will advise what to take for aches, pains or joint swelling, and it may be necessary to try a few different preparations to discover the one which works best for you. If the treatment upsets you in any way, stop it until you speak to your doctor, even though your symptoms might temporarily return. Otherwise, avoid changing the dose without consulting your doctor. It is a good idea to keep a record of the names of the medications you take. This will help your doctor at your next visit if any follow-up treatment is needed. Further help with arthritic symptoms is available from The Arthritis Foundation who can be contacted on (08) 2972488.

SPREAD OF ROSS RIVER VIRUS

Ross River virus is transmitted by some (but not all) species of mosquitoes. When a mosquito feeds on an infected animal it takes up the virus. The virus multiplies in the mosquito and is transmitted to a second animal or person during the next feed which is

ay, the virus is transferred from one animal (or human) carrier or vector

one person to another or from an animal to a human in the absence of a mosquito vector. You cannot transmit the infection directly to your family or acquaintances through normal domestic or casual social contact.

The avoidance of mosquito bites is of great importance in the prevention of Ross river virus. This can be accomplished in several ways, including-

1. **Elimination of breeding sites.** Mosquitoes can only breed in water. There are often many sites around the home where water stands for the week or more that is necessary for the eggs to develop into adult mosquitoes. Drainage of these sites or the application of insecticides will reduce mosquito numbers. Both rainwater and septic tanks should be carefully maintained to reduce the possibility of mosquito breeding.
For more detailed information contact your local council.

2. **Self Protection.**

- Wear loose, light-coloured clothes which cover as much of the body as possible, particularly in the late afternoon and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Ensure that insect screens in the home are in good repair. If you are camping, ensure tents are fitted with effective fly screens and all the zips are working.
- Use a knock-down insecticide before retiring at night.
- When outdoors, use an effective personal insect repellent. One that contains the chemical DEET (N, N diethyl toluamide) will repel the mosquitoes that carry this virus. Your pharmacist will be able to advise on suitable products. N.B. Personal repellent is only effective for 3-4 hours, however it is important not to over- apply particularly on children.
- Mosquito coils are extremely useful when outdoors.

SUMMARY

CAUSE - a virus transmitted by mosquitoes.

SYMPTOMS - muscle and joint pain, headache, joint swelling, tiredness, fever and inability to concentrate.

TESTS - one or two blood tests.

TREATMENT - symptomatic, to reduce pain, swelling and fever if present.

RECOVERY- will be complete, but can take some months as the symptoms can recur periodically, even after the virus has been eliminated.

PREVENTION - avoid mosquito bites. Use protective clothing and an effective Insect repellent.

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