

Understanding Chikungunya



Chikungunya is a virus spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. It was first found in Africa in the early 1950s and caused some outbreaks in Africa and Asia in the 1960s. Over time it has spread to other parts of the world. It reached the Caribbean and the Americas in the 2000s.

How to say it

chihk-uhn-GOON-yuh

What causes chikungunya?

You can get the chikungunya virus from the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes that attack during the day are the main carriers of the disease. If they bite an infected person, they can pass the virus on to other people.

What are the symptoms of chikungunya?

Symptoms often appear 3 to 7 days after an infected mosquito bites you. In rare cases it's fatal. The most common symptoms include high fever and severe joint pain, often in the hands and feet. This joint pain gives the virus its African name, which means "that which bends up." Some people may also have:

- Headache
- Extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- Muscle pain
- Red, swollen eyes
- Upset stomach (nausea) or vomiting
- Joint swelling
- Rash

How is chikungunya treated?

No medicine is currently available to treat this virus. There is no vaccine to prevent it. Treatment is aimed at easing symptoms. Treatments include:

- **Rest.** You may feel better faster if you get plenty of rest.
- **Fluids.** Drinking lots of fluids will help you stay hydrated. Don't have alcohol or drinks with caffeine.
- **Medicine.** Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help ease fever and joint pain.

Don't give aspirin (or medicine that contains aspirin) to a child younger than age 19 unless directed by your child's provider. Taking aspirin can put your child at risk for Reye syndrome. This is a rare but very serious disorder. It most often affects the brain and the liver.

How can I prevent chikungunya?

The best way to prevent chikungunya is to prevent mosquito bites:

- Use an insect repellent (see below) that contains EPA-approved ingredients. Follow the instructions on the label about how to apply and when to reapply.
 - DEET
 - Picaridin (also called icaridin)
 - Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE). **Don't** use products with OLE on children younger than age 3. Check with your child's healthcare provider about what products to use.
 - Para-menthan-diol (PMD). **Don't** use products with PMD on children younger than age 3. Check with your child's provider about what products to use.
 - IR3535
 - 2-undecanone
- Wear socks, shoes, a long-sleeve top, and pants.
- Treat your clothing, shoes, and tent with permethrin, a type of insecticide, before camping. Don't put it directly on your skin. You can also buy gear that's already treated.
- Stay in indoor areas that have screens or air conditioning
- Put a mosquito net around your bed

What are possible complications of chikungunya?

Most people who have chikungunya feel better within a week. But the joint pain and stiffness may last for months or years after you first get the illness. In rare cases, it causes serious infection or death in healthy people.

The virus can turn into a serious, even life-threatening illness in young children, pregnant women, and older adults. People who have a weak immune system or other health conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes, are also at higher risk for serious complications.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Call your provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Muscle or joint pain that lasts for more than 3 to 4 days
- Headache, confusion, or severe sleepiness
- New muscle weakness or paralysis

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