

# FACT SHEET: Dengue

June 2024

## WHAT IS DENGUE?

Dengue is a disease caused by one of four closely related viruses that can spread to people by the bite of an infected female mosquito. Dengue is a leading cause of illness and death in tropical and subtropical areas. Dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) is a more severe form of dengue infection that is caused by the same viruses that cause dengue.

## WHO CAN GET DENGUE?

Anyone. However, most people in the United States who get dengue have recently traveled from areas where dengue is common.

## HOW IS DENGUE SPREAD?

Dengue is spread when a mosquito bites an infected person and then bites someone else. It is most commonly transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes. These mosquitoes bite during the day and night and are the same types of mosquitoes that spread Zika and chikungunya. Dengue can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, around the time of birth, or through breastfeeding. Rarely, dengue can be spread through organ transplant, blood transfusion, or injury by a used needle.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DENGUE?

Most people (75%) have mild or no symptoms. The most common symptoms are a high fever, severe headache, severe pain behind the eyes, joint pain, muscle and bone pain, rash, and mild bleeding (such as nose or gum bleeds, and easy bruising). The symptoms of dengue are similar to those of chikungunya and Zika. In cases of DHF, the high fever lasts from 2-7 days. Once the fever declines, a person may develop persistent vomiting, severe abdominal pain, and difficulty breathing. When these symptoms begin, small blood vessels (capillaries) throughout the body become “leaky” (permeable), allowing fluid to buildup. This could lead to circulatory failure and shock if not treated. Young children, as well as adults exposed to the virus for the first time generally have a milder illness than older children and adults.

## HOW SOON DO SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

Symptoms usually begin 4-10 days after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito.

## IS THERE A VACCINE FOR DENGUE?

A dengue vaccine exists but is not approved for use by U.S. travelers who are visiting but not living in an area where dengue is common. The currently available vaccine is most protective for people who have already been infected with dengue.

## HOW IS DENGUE TREATED?

There is no specific treatment for dengue. Treatment is supportive and based on a patient’s clinical condition. Acetaminophen (also known as paracetamol) should be used to control fever and relieve pain. Aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs should be avoided to reduce the risk of bleeding. Symptoms of DHF usually last for 3-10 days.

## HOW CAN PEOPLE PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST DENGUE?

The best way to protect against dengue is to avoid mosquito bites. Anyone traveling to affected areas should take the following steps to avoid mosquito bites:

- Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellents.
- Sleep under a mosquito net.
- Use air conditioning if possible, keeping windows closed.
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items.

If you have dengue, protect others from getting sick by avoiding mosquito bites and wearing mosquito repellent during the first week of illness.

## WHAT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about dengue and other related health topics can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit [dchealth.dc.gov](https://dchealth.dc.gov) or email us at [vectorborne.epi@dc.gov](mailto:vectorborne.epi@dc.gov).

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