

DENGUE FEVER

Patient Information Fact Sheet

›What is Dengue Fever?

Dengue fever is a viral infection that causes a severe flu-like illness. The main symptoms are: fever (as high as 104–105 °F), intense headache, pain behind the eyes, pain in the joints and muscles, and rash (usually 2–5 days after fever starts). The fever usually abates in 5–7 days, although full recovery may be delayed by fatigue and depression.

There are four strains of dengue fever. Recovery from infection will provide long-term protection against that specific strain. However, those with a history of previous infection are thought to be at increased risk of bleeding complications (dengue hemorrhagic fever) if they contract a subsequent dengue infection. In severe cases, death can occur, but this is very rare in travelers.

›How do you contract Dengue fever?

Dengue fever is transmitted by the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. This mosquito bites mainly during the daytime, unlike the malaria-carrying mosquitoes that bite at dusk and during the night. Epidemics can occur in both urban and rural areas. Dengue fever is found in many countries of the tropics, with a high incidence in Asia, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Central and South America, and northern Australia. The incubation period after a bite from an infected mosquito is 3–14 days (usually 4–7).

›How is Dengue Fever diagnosed?

Diagnosis is usually based on the symptoms and confirmed by specific blood tests. Some tests include an antibody titer for dengue virus types, a complete blood count (CBC) or a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for dengue virus types.

›How is Dengue Fever treated and prevented?

There is no specific treatment for dengue fever, but rest and painkillers (eg, **acetaminophen** [Tylenol]) can help relieve the symptoms. Aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen are typically avoided.

The best prevention is to avoid mosquito bites. Use an effective insect repellent on exposed skin, and consider treating cotton clothing, along with wrist and ankle bands, with repellents containing DEET (avoid use on plastics and artificial fibers). There is currently no vaccine available to protect against dengue fever.

›Further information

MASTA Travel Health: www.masta-travel-health.com.

PubMed Health: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002350/

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