

Dear Principal

**Mosquito-borne diseases: information for school communities**

I am writing to seek your assistance in alerting your school community about a range of health risks associated with mosquito bites. Recent heavy rainfall and flooding in NSW has led to high numbers of mosquitoes in some parts of the state.

Mosquitoes can transmit a number of viral infections including Ross River virus and Barmah Forest virus and there have been large numbers of these infections reported so far in 2011. More recently, a rarer but more serious mosquito-borne infection called Murray Valley Encephalitis (MVE) has been detected in western NSW.

It is likely that the risk period may extend through until Easter.

**I seek your assistance in promoting awareness about the prevention of mosquito bites among school students who live in western NSW and for any school groups planning to travel west of the Great Dividing Range on school camps or excursions.**

Mosquitoes are most active around dusk and in the first few hours of the evening and again at dawn. Rivers, creeks, wetlands and recently-flooded land allows mosquitoes to breed and so people living near or visiting these areas need to be especially careful to prevent mosquito bites.

**Recommended ways to prevent mosquito bites**

- Cover up when outside and mosquitoes are active (especially around dawn and around dusk). Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting long pants and sleeves and covered footwear.
- Use an effective personal insect repellent on all exposed skin. The best mosquito repellents contain Diethyl Toluamide (DEET) or Picaridin.
- Re-apply personal insect repellent according to directions as protection wears off. The stronger the concentration of an insect repellent, the less frequently it will need to be applied to stop mosquito bites. Repellents containing low concentrations of DEET or Picaridin provide shorter periods of protection and need to be reapplied more frequently.

- Mosquito coils or plug-in vapourising mats are effective when used indoors. Devices that use light to attract and electrocute insects are not effective.
- Ensure houses are fitted with flyscreens on the doors and windows to prevent entry of mosquitoes.
- When camping, use flyscreens on caravans and tents or sleep under mosquito nets.

I encourage you display this [poster](#) in and around your school to raise awareness about the issue, especially if your school is located in western NSW.

If you require more information about mosquito-borne infections or measures to take to prevent mosquito bites, I would encourage you to make contact with your local [public health unit](#) and to review some of the information in the following links:

**General information about avoiding mosquito bites:**

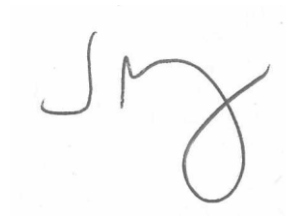
- [Radio advertisement: "preventing mosquito bites"](#)
- [Video: "mosquito borne disease in NSW"](#)

**Murray valley encephalitis information**

- [NSW Health media release: Murray Valley Encephalitis \(2 March 2011\)](#)
- [MVE factsheet](#)

It would be most appreciated if you could share this information with your school community.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jeremy McAnulty  
**Director, Centre for Health**

11 March 2011