

Dengue Fever

Dengue is an infectious disease transmitted mainly through mosquito bites. Dengue outbreaks occur often in Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, popular holiday destinations of Hong Kong people who are advised to take extra care when travelling to these places.

The disease takes between 3 and 8 days to incubate and become full blown. Young children who contract it usually develop a fever which is followed by a rash. Older children and adults come down with high fever which may rise to 39°C. They also suffer severe muscle, joint and bone pains commonly known as "breakbone fever" and may have severe headaches and pain at the back of the eyes as well.

Over 50 per cent of patients develop a rash while having a fever. Sometimes, minor bleeding occurs in the nose and gums. Patients generally recover within 7 to 10 days.

However, some kinds of dengue are potentially lethal such as the Dengue Shock Syndrome and the Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever which, if not treated in time, can kill.

At present, there are no antiviral agents to combat the dengue virus. Patients only take medicine and consume a lot of water to bring down the fever.

Patients with Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever or Dengue Shock Syndrome need to be treated in hospital and monitored closely.

Almost all of the dengue cases that occurred in Hong Kong in recent years were

brought in from elsewhere, mainly Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand which, together, accounted for almost 70 per cent of imported cases.

Protective measures include wearing long-sleeve clothes and trousers, avoiding mosquito-breeding places and, most importantly, using insect repellents.

The most common carrier of dengue fever in Hong Kong is the *Aedes Albopictus*, or Tiger Mosquito, which is characterised by its black and white striped legs.