



Be aware of **dengue** and **dengue** haemorrhagic **fever**

Dengue is a *day biting* mosquito-borne infection which has become a major international public health concern in recent decades. It causes a severe flu-like illness, and sometimes a potentially lethal complication called Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF).

Dengue is found in tropical and sub-tropical regions around the world, predominantly in urban and semi-urban areas. For once Africa does not bear the main burden as South East Asia and South America has a much higher incidence of dengue than the African continent.

50 million infections

The incidence of dengue has grown dramatically around the world in recent decades. Some 2.5 billion people – two fifths of the world's population – are now at risk from dengue. The WHO currently estimates there may be 50 million dengue infections worldwide every year.

The disease is now endemic in more than 100 countries in Africa, the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean, South-east Asia and the Western Pacific. South-east Asia and the Western Pacific are the most seriously affected. Before 1970 only nine countries had experienced DHF epidemics, a number which increased more than four-fold by 1995.

Dengue viruses are transmitted to humans through the bites of infected female *Aedes* mosquitoes. Mosquitoes generally acquire the virus while feeding on the blood of an infected person. For 8-10 days after virus incubation an infected mosquito is capable of transmitting the virus for the rest of its life, during probing and blood feeding.

The disease presents with fever, flu-like symptoms and often a rash just a few days after an infected mosquito bite.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for Dengue, but appropriate medical care frequently saves the lives of patients with the more serious DHF. The latter complication only occurs in local residents previously exposed to Dengue.

Prevention

Although there is a vaccine in the pipeline, the only way to prevent Dengue virus transmission is to avoid the disease-carrying mosquitoes.