

## SAFETY ALERT – 001/23 - JANUARY 2023

# PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE REGARDING INCREASED MOSQUITO-BORNE DISEASE RISK

### Key Information

Due to recent flooding, all Victorians should take measures to reduce their risk of mosquito bites this mosquito season. Parts of Victoria are at comparably higher risk from Murray Valley encephalitis virus and/or Japanese encephalitis virus due to environmental factors and weather conditions.

Some schools within CES Ltd are considered to be in very high-risk and high-risk areas (please see Appendix 1).

This Safety Alert contains key information to protect against mosquito bites and subsequent mosquito-borne disease, including priority actions for very-high risk and high-

### Advice for Schools and Early Childhood Education and Care Centres

There is an increased risk of mosquito-borne diseases in Victoria this mosquito season, due to the recent flooding events in northern Victoria and ongoing environmental conditions that support mosquito breeding. Mosquito-borne diseases that can occur in Victoria include *Japanese encephalitis (JE)* and *Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE)*. JE and MVE are rare but potentially serious infections of the brain that can cause neurological complications and death.

People who spend time outdoors in areas where these viruses have been detected or are believed to be circulating are at increased risk of infection if they are bitten by mosquitoes.

Murray Valley encephalitis virus, and a similar virus called West Nile/Subtype Kunjin virus, have recently been detected in mosquitoes in the Murray Valley from Mildura to Wodonga, and to Bendigo in the south. Multiple detections have occurred around Mildura, and the presence of other risk factors suggests this is a particularly high-risk location for contracting disease.

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019*, landowners or occupiers (including schools) are responsible for mosquito management on their property. The Department of Health is currently working with multiple public sector stakeholders to communicate areas of elevated risk where they have been identified. In response to this risk, the Department of Health has issued a safety alert to schools and early childhood education and care centres (ECECCs) and schools to advise them of the risk and to provide guidance on how to reduce the risk of mosquito bites and subsequent mosquito-borne disease.

that the advice will be updated should the situation change. The advice is state-wide, as well as additional recommendations for settings in high-risk





- Enclosed and mosquito-protected areas are available to host activities when mosquito biting is very high e.g., an indoor hall or outdoor area with insect screens (this will not apply to full camping settings without built structures).
- Residual barrier treatments have been applied to the relevant base camp areas to protect children when they are sleeping or undertaking activities around commonly used areas.

In addition, policies and staff management of students should promote and allow compliance with health promotion measures:

- Personal protective measures such as insect repellent application should be actively promoted.
- Provide children with dedicated time for application/re-application of repellent.
- Ensure students pack repellent and long loose clothing anytime they are moving away from the base camp.
- Do not delay taking preventive measures if mosquitoes are noticeably impacting children (e.g., pause activities to apply repellent and put on long loose-fitting clothing).
- Do not delay moving

## ATTACHMENT 1: Definitions of high-risk and very high-risk areas

### Current Victorian situation

The risk of mosquito-borne diseases is currently heightened in Victoria. All Victorians should take measures to reduce their risk of mosquito bites this mosquito season. Parts of Victoria are at comparably higher risk from Murray Valley encephalitis virus and/or Japanese encephalitis virus due to environmental factors and weather conditions. These areas are outlined below.

### Risk assessment approach

Figure 1. Map of high risk LGAs in Victoria as of 20 January 2023 (note: LGAs with recent detection of MVE virus in mosquitoes are highlighted in red).

### Very high-risk settings

The risk for mosquito exposure is not uniform across LGAs and may fluctuate depending on dynamic factors such as rainfall, wind and receding flood waters.

Schools, ECEC centres and school camps within a high-risk LGA that meet one or more of the following criteria may be considered “very high-risk”:

- in close proximity of a water body (creek, river, lake), wetlands or flooded bushland; and/or
- impacted by noticeable daytime mosquito activity for most days in a week.

The designation of a “very high-risk” area is to assist with prioritisation of resources and treatments within LGAs. Very high-risk areas should be prioritised for mosquito control/management (residual spraying and breeding site removal) in the first instance, followed by properties within a broader 10km risk profile, followed by other high



## Control of adult mosquitoes

The extreme and extensive rain and flood conditions have created hundreds of thousands of hectares of mosquito



## Definitions

Acronym	Explanation	Link for further information
Japanese encephalitis (JE)		

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact [peopleandculture@ceosand.catholic.edu.au](mailto:peopleandculture@ceosand.catholic.edu.au) OR

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