

Media statements issued between 31 October and 23 November 2022 discussing health issues related to climate events.

NSW Health: NSW significantly expands access to JE vaccine

[04 November 2022](#)

NSW has widened access to free Japanese encephalitis (JE) vaccine to a broader group of people from today, Friday 4 November.

JE vaccine is now recommended for people aged two months or older who live or routinely work in 41 [Local Government Areas](#) with identified JE risk in the west of NSW who:

- Spend significant time outdoors (four hours per day), for unavoidable work, recreation, education, or other essential activities, OR
- Are living in temporary or flood damaged accommodation (e.g. camps, tents, dwellings exposed to the external environment) that place them at increased risk of exposure to mosquitoes, OR
- Are engaged in the prolonged outdoor recovery efforts (clean up) of stagnant waters following floods.

NSW Health and the NSW Department of Primary Industries are working closely together, with the support of local councils, to ensure a comprehensive response to JE, including vaccination, and mosquito surveillance and control. NSW Health is supporting local councils to undertake mosquito control and other surveillance activities.

Executive Director of Health Protection NSW, Dr Jeremy McAnulty said the key to protecting yourself from JE and other mosquito borne infections is avoiding mosquito bites. For those people who will be exposed to mosquito bites in affected areas, vaccination also helps protect against JE infection.

Dr McAnulty emphasised that supply of vaccine continues to be constrained in Australia, but that people most at risk should get vaccinated with the supply available in NSW.

“I encourage those people at highest risk because they spend a lot of time outdoors in affected areas to take advantage of the free access to the vaccine as soon as possible, particularly as it can take two weeks or more following vaccination to develop a protective immune response to the virus,” Dr McAnulty said.

NSW Health has placed orders for additional vaccines that are expected to arrive in the first part of 2023.

Dr Sarah Britton, Chief Veterinary Officer from the NSW Department of Primary Industries said, as well as people in the 39 LGAs, people who work in high-risk settings continue to be recommended vaccination regardless of where they live.

“Vaccination is also strongly recommended for people who live in any part of NSW and work, live at, or are visiting a piggery, including farm workers and their families, animal transport workers, vets and others involved in the care of pigs. This extends to pork abattoirs and pork rendering plants,” Dr Britton said.

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JE vaccine is available through local General Practitioners (GPs). People who meet the eligibility criteria should make an appointment with their GP and let them know it is for the JE vaccine. Some GPs may require a few days' notice so they can order the vaccine.

Last mosquito season, 13 people in NSW were clinically diagnosed with JE in NSW and two of those people sadly died. All were estimated to have acquired the virus between mid-January and the end of February 2022. Sentinel surveillance for JE in mosquitos has commenced for this mosquito season.

JE is a serious disease caused by the JE virus, however only around one per cent of people infected with the JE virus will experience symptoms.

JE is spread to humans by infected mosquitoes. People are not able to pass the virus to other people. Humans also cannot get infected with the virus by touching an infected animal or eating animal products, including pork products.

Australian mosquitoes can carry a range of viruses for which there are no vaccines, so it is vital to avoid mosquito bites.

Protect yourself and your family by:

- covering openings such as windows and doors with insect screens and checking there are no have gaps in them
removing items that might collect water (such as old tyres, empty pots) outside your house where mosquitoes can breed
- improving drainage on your property so that water does not become stagnant
- wearing light, loose-fitting long-sleeved shirts, long pants and covered footwear and socks, especially around dusk and dawn
- applying repellent to all areas of exposed skin, using repellents that contain DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus
- re-applying repellent regularly, particularly after swimming, being sure to always apply sunscreen first and then apply repellent
- using insecticide sprays, vapour dispensing units and mosquito coils to repel mosquitos (mosquito coils should only be used outside).

For further information on JE virus and ways to protect yourself visit the [NSW Health website](#).

NSW Health: Japanese encephalitis virus detected again in the Murray River region

[18 November 2022](#)

Local communities along the Murray River are encouraged to take measures to protect themselves against mosquito bites as routine animal surveillance indicates Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus has survived winter in the region.

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NSW Health Executive Director, Dr Jeremy McAnulty said the detection of JE in pigs in the region was made as part of planned ongoing surveillance for the mosquito borne virus.

Dr McAnulty said it was a timely reminder to the community to take action to prevent mosquito bites including applying repellent regularly to all areas of exposed skin, wearing loose, long-sleeved, light-coloured clothing and covered footwear when outside, and mosquito proofing homes.

“Despite the winter season where mosquito populations usually diminish, it appears the Japanese encephalitis virus has continued to circulate along the Murray River, presumably between mosquitoes and waterbirds,” Dr McAnulty said.

Dr McAnulty reminded the community that a broader group of people are now eligible for free vaccination against the virus, and he strongly encourages those people get vaccinated.

“Now is the right time to vaccinate if you spend a considerable amount of time outdoors, because it takes between two to four weeks following vaccination to develop a protective immune response to the virus.

“I would also continue to urge the community to stay vigilant and take precautions against mosquito bites altogether because, aside from Japanese encephalitis, mosquitoes carry a range of viruses for which there are no vaccines.”

JE vaccine is recommended for people aged two months or older who live or routinely work in [41 Local Government Areas](#) with identified JE risk in the south and west of NSW who meet the eligibility criteria.

Dr McAnulty advised community members to call ahead and make an appointment with a GP or pharmacist and let them know it is for the JE vaccine as a few days’ notice may be required to order in the vaccine. Pharmacists who have completed appropriate training are able to provide JE vaccine in NSW.

Supply of JE vaccine continues to be severely constrained in Australia. People who are eligible for vaccination are urged to come forward for vaccination with stock currently available in NSW, and additional vaccines are expected to arrive in the first part of 2023.

The latest data from the NSW Arbovirus Surveillance & Mosquito Monitoring Program shows very high number of mosquitoes in the Murray River region, however the species of mosquito most capable of spreading JE were detected in low levels within the region.

There have been no detected cases of JE in NSW residents so far this mosquito season.

Australian mosquitoes can carry a range of viruses for which there are no vaccines, so it is vital to avoid mosquito bites.

Protect yourself and your family by:

- covering openings such as windows and doors with insect screens and checking there are no have gaps in them

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- removing items that might collect water (such as old tyres, empty pots) outside your house where mosquitoes can breed
- improving drainage on your property so that water does not become stagnant
- wearing light, loose-fitting long-sleeved shirts, long pants and covered footwear and socks, especially around dusk and dawn
- applying repellent to all areas of exposed skin, using repellents that contain DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus
- re-applying repellent regularly, particularly after swimming, being sure to always apply sunscreen first and then apply repellent
- using insecticide sprays, vapour dispensing units and mosquito coils to repel mosquitos (mosquito coils should only be used outside).

For further information on JE virus and ways to protect yourself visit the [mosquito borne diseases](#) webpage.

Victorian Department of Health: Expanding access to the Japanese encephalitis virus vaccine

[04/11/22](#)

More Victorians are now eligible to be vaccinated against Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV), with further expansions to the eligibility criteria.

While there are currently no confirmed cases of JEV in Victoria, flooding and heavy rainfall across the state can mean greater risk of infections spread by mosquitoes this season.

Vaccination against JEV is now available for anyone aged two months or older who:

- lives, or routinely works, in a high-risk area and spends significant time outdoors (four hours per day), for unavoidable work, recreational, educational or other essential activities, or
- is living in temporary or flood-damaged accommodation that places them at an increased risk of exposure to mosquitoes, or
- is engaged in the prolonged clean-up of stagnant waters following floods.

As there is limited supply of the vaccine internationally, eligibility criteria and free options for JEV vaccination are being managed carefully to ensure those most at risk have access. We will continue to work with the Commonwealth and other states to make the best use of available vaccines, and to obtain more vaccines when available.

Wangaratta, Strathbogie and Benalla have been added to the local government areas where the vaccine is available to those eligible. The vaccine is free for people who meet these criteria and is available from local councils and local public health units, including some COVID-19 vaccination hubs. Select GPs and community pharmacies can also provide the vaccine itself for free, but may charge a fee for the administration.

“While getting vaccinated is important, everyone should focus on preventing being bitten by mosquitoes. This includes wearing long, loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing, using insect

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repellents, clearing stagnant water around your home, and avoiding areas with lots of mosquitoes, especially at dusk and dawn,” Victoria’s Deputy Chief Health Officer Associate Professor Deborah Friedman said.

“We know mosquitoes don’t breed in initial flood waters, but that the risk increases as these waters recede and leave behind pools of stagnant water.”

People living in areas experiencing mosquito activity should undertake these protective measures now and over the coming months to protect themselves against not just JEV, but other mosquito-borne diseases for which no vaccine is available – including Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus and Murray Valley encephalitis.

Most people who develop JEV infection will have no symptoms, but 1 per cent can develop serious illness. JEV can cause a rare, potentially severe infection of the brain.

Earlier in 2022, Victoria recorded 13 cases of JEV infection, the most recent of which was in March. This was the first time locally acquired JEV cases had been seen in Victoria, as it normally occurs in southern and eastern Asia, Papua New Guinea, and the Torres Strait.

“While the risk remains low, and we have not detected any Japanese encephalitis in mosquitoes or animals as part of our surveillance activities so far this season, this increased access means more people can now protect themselves,” Associate Professor Friedman added.

For the full eligibility criteria, visit the [Department of Health’s website](#). More information and advice regarding Japanese encephalitis is available on the [Better Health Channel](#).

Victorian Department of Health: Epidemic thunderstorm asthma high risk forecast for Wimmera

[09/11/22](#)

A high risk of epidemic thunderstorm asthma has been forecast for the Wimmera region on Thursday 10 November.

The combination of forecast extreme grass pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm with strong winds means that there is a chance that a large number of people may develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time.

The Mallee, South West, Central and North Central regions have a moderate risk forecast tomorrow, while the Northern Country, North East, West & South Gippsland and East Gippsland regions have a low risk forecast.

Health and emergency services are monitoring the situation closely and are ready to respond.

People in Wimmera with asthma or hay fever, or who experience wheezing, breathlessness, a feeling of tightness in the chest or a persistent cough, should have their reliever medication

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with them at all times tomorrow, and avoid the wind gusts before the storm by going inside and closing their windows and doors.

People who have asthma or seasonal hay fever should review the asthma first aid steps.

People should call Nurse on Call on [1300 60 60 24](tel:1300606024) or see their local doctor if they require medical advice.

There are around 50 GP respiratory clinics across Victoria offering free respiratory care. Face-to-face and telehealth appointments are available and some clinics are open at night and on weekends.

For information on clinic locations and operating hours, visit: [GP Respiratory Clinics](#)

Call triple zero (000) immediately if someone is not breathing, if their asthma suddenly becomes worse or is not improving, or if the person is having an asthma attack and a reliever puffer is not available.

For up-to-date information, visit the [VicEmergency website](#) or download the VicEmergency App.

Supercare Pharmacies are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with a private consulting room and a free registered nursing service on site from 6 pm to 10 pm, every day. Find a [Supercare Pharmacy](#) near you.

In an emergency, asthma reliever puffers are available from pharmacies without a prescription. People should also follow up with their doctor.

For more information on thunderstorm asthma, visit the [Better Health Channel](#)

Victorian Department of Health: Epidemic thunderstorm asthma high risk forecast

[12/11/22](#)

A high risk of epidemic thunderstorm asthma has been forecast for the Northern Country and North Central districts on Sunday, 13 November 2022.

The combination of forecast extreme grass pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm with strong winds means there is a chance a large number of people may develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time.

All other districts have a moderate risk forecast tomorrow, including the Wimmera, Mallee, South West, Central, North East, West & South Gippsland and East Gippsland regions.

Health and emergency services are monitoring the situation closely and are ready to respond.

People in high-risk areas with asthma or hay fever, or who experience wheezing, breathlessness, a feeling of tightness in the chest or a persistent cough, should have their

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For more information on [thunderstorm asthma](#), visit the Better Health Channel.