

How to Prevent Dengue



The rainy season in the Philippines has become synonymous “dengue outbreak season.”

In 2013, the Department of Health (DOH) said more than 42,000 Filipinos have been afflicted by dengue from January to the 1st week of June. A total of 193 people have since died. Although fewer cases have been reported in Metro Manila and its surrounding provinces, cases in the Western Visayas and parts of Mindanao have increased to more than 100%.

The US Center for Disease Control classifies dengue as “a disease caused by any one of four closely related dengue viruses (DENV 1, DENV 2, DENV 3, or DENV 4). The viruses are transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. It is estimated that there are over 100 million cases of dengue worldwide each year.”

The CDC said more than 3.5 billion people in 120 countries, over half of the earth’s population, live under the threat of dengue infection. It is a leading cause of illness and death in tropical countries such as the Philippines.

Symptoms of Dengue

Dengue and Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) is transmitted by the bite of an Aedes mosquito that is infected with a dengue virus. The mosquito becomes infected with dengue virus when it bites a person who has dengue virus in their blood. The person can either have symptoms of dengue fever or DHF, or they may have no symptoms. After about one week, the mosquito can then transmit the virus while biting a healthy person. Dengue cannot be spread directly from person to person.

The CDC listed the principal symptoms of dengue fever as:

- High fever
- Severe headache
- Severe pain behind the eyes
- Joint, muscle and bone pain
- Rash
- Mild bleeding (e.g., nose or gums bleed, easy bruising)

Generally, younger children and those with their first dengue infection have a milder illness than older children and adults.

Far more serious is DHF, with general signs and symptoms consistent with dengue fever. Symptoms include vomiting, severe abdominal pain, and difficulty breathing. The smallest capillaries become excessively permeable ("leaky"), allowing fluid to escape from the blood vessels into the peritoneum and pleural cavity that may lead to failure of the circulatory system and shock, followed by possible death.

Addressing the Dangers of Dengue

To address the danger posed by dengue, government is ramping up a nationwide campaign calling for more participation from communities to help in anti-dengue efforts.

The DOH has partnered with the Departments of Interior & Local Government (DILG), Science and Technology (DOST), and Education (DepEd) to counter the spread of dengue.

“DILG will lead all local government units to implement the Aksyon Barangay Kontra Dengue in high-risk communities; DOST and DepEd together with DOH will scale up the home-grown ovi-larva (OL)-trap technology in selected, priority schools. The new set of local chief executives can easily make dengue control one of their top priorities,” the DOH announced in mid- June.

The President issued an Executive Order that launched the National Tepok Lamok- Dengue Sapok program and the start of the 4 O’Clock Habit where the DOH leads clean-up operations to eliminate all potential mosquito breeding grounds every 4:00 pm.

The *Aedes aegyoti* mosquito, which carries the dengue virus, breeds in clear, stagnant water accumulated in cans, old tires, flower vases, pots, pails and other containers. People are advised to eliminate these things in their homes, schools and workplaces.

The DOH said that only by cleaning up the environment and prompt medical attention can the vicious cycle of transmission be broken- especially in regards to children.

According to Maria Rosario Capeding of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, dengue is the leading cause of childhood hospitalizations in the country.

She said children 1 to 9 years old accounted for nearly 60 percent of dengue-related deaths in 2011.

The CDC explained there is no specific medication for treatment of a dengue infection. Persons who think they have dengue should use paracetamol. They should rest, drink plenty of fluids, and consult a doctor. If they feel worse (e.g., develop vomiting and severe abdominal pain) in the first 24 hours after the fever declines, they should go immediately to the hospital.

No vaccine has been developed for preventing dengue and that the best preventive measure is to eliminate the places where the mosquito lays her eggs, primarily artificial containers that hold water.

- Items that collect rainwater or to store water (plastic containers, drums, buckets, pails, tires) should be covered or properly discarded.

- Pet and animal watering containers and flower vases should be emptied and cleaned at least once a week.
- Keep window and door screens closed reduces the risk of mosquitoes coming indoors.
- Keep the gutters clean of leaves and debris that might hinder water flow.
- Proper application of mosquito repellents on exposed skin and clothing decreases the risk of mosquito bites.

Dengue season should be synonymous with Bayanihan season when communities work together to prevent this epidemic from spreading. Keep your family safe with increased awareness on how to recognize dengue, how to control the mosquito that transmits and being responsible for keeping our homes free of water containers where mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

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