

Japanese encephalitis — warning for travel to Australia

A Level 2 Travel Health Alert to Australia has been issued for Japanese encephalitis (JE).

JE is spread to humans by bites from infected mosquitoes. It's a rare but potentially serious virus that can infect the human brain, causing brain swelling and even death. JE cannot be transmitted from person to person, or by eating meat from an infected animal.

JE is endemic to parts of Asia and the west Pacific. It's unknown how JE came to Australia, and 2022 is the first time the virus has been discovered in southern Australia. There are currently more than 70 infected piggeries across Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia.

The number of human JE cases reported in Australia in 2022 is 37 (including 3 deaths), which is unusually high compared to 15 reported cases over the past 10 years.

JE symptoms

Most people will experience mild or no symptoms, but JE may develop as a serious disease in some. Seek immediate medical care if you develop a fever, sudden headache, vomiting, disorientation, coma or seizures.

Prevention methods

There are no medicines or cures to treat JE. Travellers to Australia should protect themselves by preventing mosquito bites. Vaccination is recommended for travel to risk areas, for those who will reside near pig operations, and for anyone travelling to Australia's Outer Torres Strait Islands who will be staying for longer than one month.