

Australian encephalitis in Western Australia

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There have been two cases of Australian encephalitis due to infection with Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) virus in Western Australia this wet season. The first was a severe case of encephalitis in a 22 year old male who contracted the disease in Carnarvon, a coastal town in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia. The patient has not recovered fully and is still in hospital in Perth. The second case was a 32 year old woman who had a mild disease and has now fully recovered. She contracted the virus in either Broome or Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Both cases had dates of onset in early May,

were MVE IgM positive and had a rising antibody titre to MVE virus by both haemagglutination inhibition test and enzyme linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA).

There were extremely heavy wet season rains in areas of the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia in January and February this year. Record catches (up to 35,000 per trap) of *Cx. annulirostris* mosquitoes (the major vector of MVE) were obtained at several locations in the Kimberley and Pilbara during mosquito surveillance carried out in March and April this year. MVE and

Kunjin virus activity is monitored in Western Australia using sentinel chicken flocks located at most towns, two Aboriginal communities and some mine sites in the region (24 flocks at 20 locations). There was an early warning of increased MVE activity from the sentinel chicken flocks in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions in March this year and from the Gascoyne region in April. The Health Department of Western Australia has issued a number of public health warnings to residents and visitors to the north-west. These include advice on the need to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.