

Beware of **stings**

Protect ourselves from
vector-borne diseases



Centre for Health Protection



Department of Health

VECTORS AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

Beware of stings - Protect ourselves from vector-borne diseases

Vectors are small organisms such as mosquitoes, mites and ticks that can carry disease from one infected person (or animal) to another person and place to place. The diseases caused by these vectors are called vector-borne diseases.



In Hong Kong, common vector-borne diseases in human include dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, scrub typhus and spotted fever. Dengue fever and malaria are mostly imported from endemic countries via international travel, while most cases of scrub typhus and spotted fever got the infection locally and had history of going to vegetated areas in Hong Kong, e.g. hiking areas, vegetated areas near home, outdoor recreational areas, or outdoor workplaces.

Mosquitoes are responsible for transmitting dengue fever (*Aedes* mosquitoes), Japanese encephalitis (*Culex tritaeniorhynchus* mosquitoes) and malaria (*Anopheles* mosquitoes) while scrub typhus and spotted fever are transmitted by mites and ticks respectively.

Prevention

To prevent vector-borne diseases, we need to protect ourselves from stings / bites of mosquitoes, mites and ticks, and help prevent their proliferation.

Protect yourselves against stings/bites

- Wear loose, light-coloured long-sleeved tops and trousers
- Use DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed parts of the body and clothing
- Take additional preventive measures when hiking or going to scrubby areas

Pregnant women and children of 6 months or older can use DEET-containing insect repellent



When you hike or go to scrubby areas, here are some additional preventive measures:

Prepare for the visit

- Wear shoes that cover the entire foot, avoid wearing sandals or open shoes
- Tuck trousers into socks or boots to prevent arthropods from reaching the skin
- Avoid using fragrant cosmetics or skin care products



During the visit

- Stay on footpaths and avoid walking through vegetation. Do not brush along the vegetation at the sides of footpaths
- Avoid resting on vegetation, or at humid and dark places
- Do not hang clothing on vegetation
- Do not feed wild or stray animals
- Re-apply insect repellents according to instructions



After the visit

- Inspect body parts and clothing. Clear any attached arthropods carefully
- Take a soapy shower and wash the clothes
- Inspect and clean the bodies of accompanying pets



If an attached tick is found

- Remove the tick by grasping with tweezers or fine-tipped forceps the head of the tick close to the skin and gently pulling with constant pressure
- Do not crush or twist the tick during removal
- After removing the tick, disinfect the bite area and wash hands with soap and water

Special notes when travelling abroad

If you plan to travel abroad, you should take extra precautions to protect yourselves from stings and bites.

Before the trip

- Arrange a travel health consultation with your doctor at least six weeks before the journey to determine the need for any vaccinations, vector preventive measures and anti-malarial drugs
- Vaccines for Japanese encephalitis are recommended for those who plan to stay one month or longer in Japanese encephalitis-endemic countries, particularly in rural areas, and for short-term (less than one month) travellers if they plan to have significant extensive outdoor or night-time exposure in rural areas during the transmission season of the disease
- Travellers who plan to stay in malaria-endemic areas should consult their doctors beforehand to determine if anti-malarial prophylaxis is required. This drug should be taken before and throughout the journey, then continued for some time after leaving the area



During the trip

- If travelling in endemic rural areas, carry a portable bed net and apply permethrin (an insecticide) on it. Permethrin should NOT be applied to skin
- Seek medical attention as early as possible if feeling unwell



Upon returning to Hong Kong

- Travellers who return from affected areas and feel unwell e.g. run a fever, should seek medical advice as soon as possible and provide travel details to their doctor



Help prevent vector proliferation

Prevent accumulation of stagnant water



- Change the water in vases once a week



- Clear the water in the saucers under potted plants every week



- Cover water containers tightly



- Ensure air-conditioner drip trays are free of stagnant water



- Put all used cans and bottles into covered dustbins

Control vectors and reservoir of the diseases

- Inspect and disinfest pets and pet beddings regularly
- Store food and dispose of garbage properly to prevent rat infestation



Centre for Health Protection Website: www.chp.gov.hk
24-Hour Health Education Hotline of the Department of Health: 2833 0111

