

## And now for a look at the mozzie forecast...

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Medical Entomologists from the NT Department of Health and Families can now accurately predict the timing and number of Ross River Virus (RRV) cases in the Darwin region up to one month in advance.

The entomologists created a model involving more than 15 years of weekly mosquito collections from 11 traps in the Darwin area and takes into account rainfall, average minimal temperature and mosquito numbers.

According to the study almost 1300 people in Darwin have contracted Ross River Virus over the last 15 years – the highest rate being among 30-34 year olds.

The virus is not fatal but causes flu-like symptoms within two weeks of infection including headaches, fever, pains in the muscles and joints.

Senior Medical Entomologist Peter Whelan says the new model will allow the development of an early warning system for Ross River Virus outbreaks.

“The timing and number of RRV cases in the Darwin area can be very accurately predicted up to one month in advance based on rainfall, minimum temperatures and mosquito numbers from our mosquito monitoring program.

“We took into account variables such as heavier rainfall or increased insecticidal spraying.

“It will give us the opportunity to educate people about where virus hotspots are at certain times of the year which will ultimately reduce the number of people who contract RRV.

“This is an excellent tool to more effectively control overall numbers of salt marsh and other mosquitoes as we can perform timely and more efficient spraying of mosquito breeding sites,” says Mr Whelan.

Further research will target other locations in tropical Australia to work out what RRV infection prediction model works best for each region.

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