



Pesky mozzies swarm for blood

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SWAT and scratch. The new sounds of summer are Sydneysiders dealing with the scourge of swarms of mosquitoes desperate for a taste of exposed skin.

Experts say prime breeding conditions developing after the warmest spring on record, heavy December rainfall and flooding of local wetlands by higher tides have left the city in the grip of a mosquito frenzy.

And they warn more buzzing pests are on the way.

"This has been one of the worst starts to mosquito season in years," Westmead Hospital's medical entomology director Stephen Doggett said.

Scientists are also predicting an unusually high risk of an outbreak of dangerous mosquito-borne diseases such as the Ross River and Barmah Forest viruses along the NSW coast.

Dr Doggett said the mosquito season had begun earlier this summer due to the prime breeding conditions brought on by an unseasonably warm spring.

The worst flying pest will

be the saltmarsh mosquito, almost black in colour with

striped legs, which is breeding in colossal numbers around Homebush Bay and in the mangroves and mudflats along the Georges River between Alford's Point and Bankstown. They normally fly between 5km and 10km from breeding sites, but have been recorded up to 50km from the mudflats.

Dr Doggett said above-average numbers of mozzies were being recorded along the east coast. Each insect can lay more than 100 eggs.

"The mosquito-borne viruses won't be a problem for Sydney as they need an animal host, usually a kangaroo or wallaby, for the Ross River virus," he said.

"Normally there are about 300 to 400 cases along the coastal strip each year. But because we haven't seen the

viruses along the coast for several years, due to small numbers of saltmarsh mosquitoes, I think the risk is up there as one of the highest for some years. This will be a risk year for the viruses."

Even Sydney hospitals are

not immune from the pests.

A visitor to Liverpool Hospital said they had seen mozzies inside the Emergency Department waiting area and in a treatment room on Christmas Day. They also saw the insects a day later in a surgical ward and last week spoke to a new mother in the maternity ward who had asked her husband to bring in a mosquito net to protect their newborn baby.

A health district spokeswoman confirmed repellent was sprayed in the ED after staff noticed mosquitoes.

HOW TO BEAT THE BITE

1. Tip out, drain or cover any outside water-holding objects
2. Screen your windows
3. Cover up or wear insect repellent
4. Use sprays, coils and plug-in zappers
5. Use hand-held, portable vacuum cleaner to suck in mozzies
6. Listen out for health warnings about mosquito-borne diseases

Source: Department of Medical Entomology, Westmead Hospital





Shell Cove's Alivia Micallef sprays insect repellent on daughter Demi, 5, Picture: Adam Ward