



**Article By: Dr June Tan MBBS MMed (Family Medicine)** - a graduate of the National University of Singapore in 1997, Dr Tan is a family physician with special interests in chronic disease management, women's health, paediatrics, and musculoskeletal conditions. She earned her Masters degree in Family Medicine in 2002, and has served as a senior family physician in a local primary care institution.

# Chikungunya Fever in Singapore

**You may have heard or read about Chikungunya fever in the local news. To date, 128 cases of Chikungunya fever have been reported to the Ministry of Health in Singapore this year alone. In early August a single case of Chikungunya fever in Jalan Jelita, right next to our clinic at Jelita, was detected.**

## So what is Chikungunya fever?

Chikungunya fever is a viral disease transmitted to humans by the bite of infected mosquitoes. The Chikungunya virus was first isolated from a patient in Tanzania in 1953, and has since been identified repeatedly in west, central and southern Africa and many areas of Asia.

## What type of illness does the Chikungunya virus cause?

The illness is characterised by fever, headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, rash and joint pain. The term

Chikungunya is Swahili for 'that which bends up'.

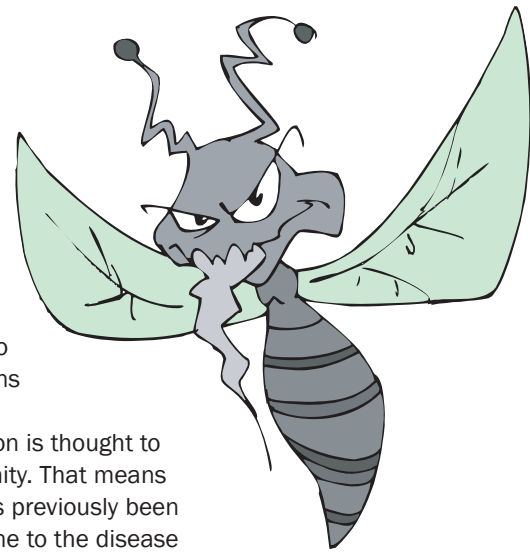
The incubation period (time from infection to illness) is usually 3-7 days. The illness typically lasts a few days to a couple of weeks.

The symptoms are very similar to that of dengue fever;

however some patients with

Chikungunya fever experience fatigue and severe joint pains that last for several weeks.

Fortunately unlike dengue, no cases of haemorrhagic (bleeding) shock syndrome have been reported in Chikungunya fever. There have also not been any reported deaths related to Chikungunya



fever, and there are no long-term complications of the illness.

Chikungunya infection is thought to confer life-long immunity. That means that a person who has previously been infected will be immune to the disease and not get re-infected in future.

## How is Chikungunya fever treated?

There is currently no medication to treat the condition, or vaccine to prevent it. However like many viral illnesses, Chikungunya fever is a self-limiting condition, and treatment is directed at relieving symptoms. Rest, fluids, and medications like paracetamol (or acetaminophen) and ibuprofen will help relieve symptoms of fever and aching.

Infected persons should be protected from further mosquito exposure (stay indoors and under a mosquito net during the first few days of illness) so that they cannot contribute to the transmission cycle.

## How can one prevent becoming infected with the Chikungunya virus?

The best way to avoid Chikungunya infection is to prevent mosquito bites. Prevention tips include:

- Getting rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths regularly. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when not in use.
- Using insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin when outdoors, especially during the day.
- Wearing long sleeves and pants, and ideally having clothes treated with permethrin or another repellent.
- Have secure screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.

While there have been cases detected locally, half of them were imported, with infection having occurred outside of Singapore. There have been reports of Chikungunya outbreaks around the region such as India, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Johor, Malacca, Negri Sembilan and Perak). Persons travelling overseas are advised to remain vigilant and seek prompt medical treatment if they are unwell and have symptoms of Chikungunya fever.

