As Top Enders prepare their vehicles, boats and camping gear for the June long weekend the Northern Territory Government is warning all Territorians that they need to take measures to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

“It isn’t just the itchiness of a mosquito bite that is worth avoiding. Some common species of mosquito can become infected with viruses after biting wildlife and can transmit these viruses to humans when they bite,” Minister for Health John Elferink said.

“Mosquito numbers are currently at relatively low levels in most urban areas however they can be present in high numbers in the vicinity of wetlands, lagoons and flood plains.

“Keep yourself safe from mosquito-borne disease. Minimize your chance of being bitten by mosquitoes by protecting yourself with a few easy precautionary measures,” he said.

Minister Elferink said to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes people should:

- Use a protective repellent containing 20 per cent DEET or Picaridin as a supplement to protective clothing when outdoors in mosquito prone areas
- Wear light-coloured clothing with long sleeves, long trousers and socks, between dusk and dawn in areas where mosquito bites are likely
- Avoid outdoor exposure around dusk and at night near wetlands and areas of dense vegetation as well as other areas of high mosquito activity
- Use mosquito-proof accommodation and camping facilities at night
- Use mosquito coils, mosquito lanterns, or other mosquito repellent devices
- Ensure children are adequately protected against mosquitoes.
- Residents near wetlands should install fly screens on all windows and doors and could consider applying a bifenthrin insecticide barrier treatment on patio and outdoor areas.
Director of Medical Entomology, Nina Kurucz said viruses can be transmitted from wildlife to humans by mosquitoes and the high risk period for human infection by the potentially fatal Murray Valley encephalitis virus (MVEV) extends from February to July.

“Territorians need to be vigilant to avoid MVE which mainly circulates in populations of water birds, and Ross River virus (RRV) which mainly circulates in populations of marsupials such as kangaroos and wallabies.” Mrs Kurucz said.

“MVE is a rare disease, but its effects can be very severe and potentially fatal. There are usually only one or two human cases of MVE recorded across northern Australia each year.

“There have already been two cases of MVE in the NT this year. Testing of sentinel chicken flocks by Berrimah Veterinary Laboratories this month has shown that MVE virus has been recently circulating in the Darwin region.

The main risk period for RRV disease is December to March however RRV cases are recorded in every month in the Top End.

There have been 220 cases of RRV in the NT so far this year. Although RRV disease isn’t fatal, its symptoms can include persistent joint, muscle and tendon pain as well as lingering fatigue, lethargy and depression. Most people with this illness will progressively improve over 3 to 6 months.

Media contact: Renee Miller 0407 400 446