

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ensuring community health during extreme weather events

As devastating floods continue to impact communities across North Queensland, public health risks are becoming more apparent.

Extreme weather events are growing more frequent, yet the extent of their impact is always unpredictable.

It is crucial people are not incidentally sacrificing their own health while trying to protect their home and loved ones.

"The impact of floodwater on homes, communities and public health can be destructive, and we're unfortunately witnessing this devastation unfold across our North Queensland communities," AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim said.

"Despite the increasing commonality of these weather events, we cannot afford to rely on the Aussie 'she'll be right' attitude.

"We need to take this threat to our community seriously.

"Mosquito numbers always increase significantly in wet and warm weather, and flooding only exacerbates this, significantly increasing the risk of mosquito borne disease such as Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV), dengue virus and Ross River virus.

"Queensland has already seen its first case of JEV since 2022, and the first cases of dengue virus in five years.

"While the chance of further cases in the community is low, stagnant water from floods heightens this risk.

"It is important communities, particularly those in the flood affected areas, are extra vigilant against mosquito bites.

"This includes seeking health care if you are experiencing symptoms such as fevers, swollen and painful joints, a rash or persistent headaches.

"Floodwater is also often contaminated by a cocktail of contaminants, putting people at risk of illness and disease like leptospirosis and melioidosis.

"Leptospirosis and melioidosis can lurk in contaminated water, mud and soil, and can enter the body through cuts, open wounds or even contact with the mouth, nose and eyes.

"We urge anyone who has come into contact with flood water and is experiencing fever, severe headache, muscle aches, chills and vomiting up to 14 days later to seek the advice of their doctor.

"In the meantime, we understand avoiding contaminated flood water is challenging for many communities but urge people to listen to authorities to ensure they can efficiently implement a response that reduces public health risks.

"Even after the water dries up, our concerns for community health will remain.

"We must ensure medical practitioners, patients and the community have access to health care, with particular attention on mental health, to recover from this devastating event."