

Key aspects briefly summarized

- Chikungunya fever is a viral infection that is transmitted by mosquitoes.
- The disease typically manifests itself with fever and severe joint pain in the hands and feet, which can last for weeks to months in some patients.
- Chikungunya fever can be prevented by protecting yourself from mosquito bites.



A 19-year-old Indian woman with chikungunya fever, South India. Her fingers and ankles were swollen and very painful.

(Photo by C. Staehelin)

Disease

Chikungunya fever is caused by the chikungunya virus, which was first described in Tanzania in 1952. The name probably comes from a local African language and means 'the bent walker', which refers to the posture of affected people who lean on walking sticks due to severe joint pain.

Occurrence / risk areas

Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands, Central and South America, the Caribbean islands, sub-Saharan Africa, Arabian Peninsula. Cases in Europe and North America are mainly imported from endemic countries. However, there are also isolated local transmissions (Italy, France, USA).

Transmission

The chikungunya virus is transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes, which are mainly active during the day.

Symptoms

The infection may cause some or all of the following symptoms: sudden onset of high fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, joint swelling, rash. The rash usually appears after the onset of the fever and usually affects the trunk and extremities. The joint pain and swelling usually occur symmetrically on both sides and mainly affect the hands and feet - but larger joints such as the knees or shoulders can also be affected. The intense joint pain can be very debilitating for those affected.

Around 5 - 10 % of those infected have persistent severe joint and limb pain even after the fever has subsided, which in some cases lasts for several months or, although rarely, even years.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis can be confirmed by blood tests: A PCR test in the first week of symptoms or a serological test (measurement of antibodies) from the second week of the disease.

Treatment

There is no treatment for the virus itself, only symptomatic treatment of the joint pain (anti-inflammatory medication).

Prevention

Preventive measures against mosquito bites during the day: Apply mosquito repellent to uncovered skin; wear long clothing; treat clothing with insecticide. For more information, see the information sheet "Protection against insect and tick bites". Another very important protective factor is so-called 'environmental hygiene': breeding sites for mosquitoes in the immediate vicinity of human dwellings should be avoided by removing all forms of containers with water (e.g. flowerpot saucers, uncovered water containers, etc.).

Vaccination: Two Chikungunya vaccines are currently approved in the US and EU (IXCHIQ® and VIMKUNYA®), but not yet in Switzerland. The Swiss Expert Committee for Travel Medicine is currently reviewing the recommendation for travellers.

Further information / references

- [BAG Switzerland EN](#)
- [WHO - Chikungunya information sheet EN](#)
- [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) EN](#)
- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\) EN](#)