

Mozzie alert after floods

New drug for Ross River needs to be tested on patients

**Sherele Moody
and Adam Hourigan**

MOSQUITOES have infected more than 150 locals with diseases this year.

NewsRegional analysis of NSW health data shows 114 people living in the Northern NSW health district were diagnosed with Ross River virus in the past seven months. This is well above last year's notification rate of 52.

Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley Councils will participate in the Northern Rivers Emerging

Vector Response Plan overseen by Tweed Council.

The plan includes the creation of a response manual, mock outbreak scenarios, building a cross scale network for the region to respond rapidly in advance of potential mosquito outbreaks.

Ross River virus is Australia's main mosquito-borne disease. There is no vaccine. The main treatment for the disease is anti-inflammatory

medications. NSW Health in February issued public alerts after it found increased mosquito numbers across the state since the floods.

Glenda (surname withheld) is the kind of woman who refuses to sit around doing nothing, but a mozzie managed to knock the wind out of the 52-year-old's sails.

Diagnosed with Ross River virus, Glenda didn't have the energy or strength to continue her social life.

"There was this horrible pain in my feet and my shoulders," she says.

"I couldn't flex my ankles so I was always walking on stiff feet. It was so painful, but the worst part was the lethargy and the fear of depression.

Glenda is one of the 114 Northern NSW residents who have contracted Ross River this year with the symptoms expected to last up to 40 weeks, but she is

determined not to let it beat her.

She said the turning point came when she replaced over-the-counter pain killers with natural remedies.

"I was taking Nurofen three times a day just to work a four-hour shift," she said. "I decided to see a naturopath and I was given magnesium powder, which is a natural anti-inflammatory."

Glenda also takes turmeric, a mixture of ginger and devil's claw and vitamin C and zinc.

"I don't think it's left my system yet but I'm feeling really good," she said.

A new treatment, Pentosan polysulfate sodium could be used to significantly reduce the duration and severity of joint pain caused by the virus. Paradigm Biopharma launched a limited clinical trial this month and is seeking people with the Ross River virus to take part.

It will be 12 months before results are to be released.