Campaign to increase awareness of Murray Valley encephalitis in remote communities across the Northern Territory, Australia

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Background

Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) is a potentially fatal disease, transmitted by the common banded mosquito, *Culex annulirostris*. Symptoms of MVE include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting and muscle aches, which can progress to drowsiness, confusion and seizure and in severe cases to delirium and coma. In the Northern Territory (NT), the high risk period for MVE is February to July, with a total of 36 MVE cases reported since recording began in 1974. A high proportion (46.7%) of these cases, with the age of the patient determined, are reported in young Indigenous children under the age of 10.

In the NT, MVE virus activity is monitored through the Department of Health’s (DoH) flavivirus surveillance program. If virus activity is detected, a media warning is issued to warn the public of potential MVE risks. These warnings are issued in the form of newspaper articles, radio and TV interviews. However, it is unknown how effective warnings, delivered in the English language are to prevent potential MVE cases in remote Indigenous communities.

MVE radio campaign 2016

In an effort to reduce the incidence of MVE in remote communities across the NT, DoH launched a radio campaign, with MVE risk messages delivered in 8 Indigenous languages. Messages in Yolngu Matha, Murrinh Patha, Anindilyakwa, Modern Tiwi and Kriol were initially produced by the DoH Environmental Health unit to warn people in remote Top End communities about mosquito borne disease following Cyclone Lam in 2015. To cover Central Australian communities, DoH further produced messages in Arrente, Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri. All messages were produced in liaison with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, and were delivered by the Australian Indigenous Radio, Yolngu Radio and CAAMA Radio between 15 February and 12 March 2016.

To further increase coverage, the English version of the message was advertised on Facebook. The MVE Facebook advertising was marketed to the target audience using Facebook’s Custom Audience Targeting. The Custom Audience used were people living in the NT, at the age of 18 to over 65 years, with an interest in Indigenous related themes. Using this method, a potential 21,000 people were reached. The Facebook advertising can be found on the NT Government YouTube channel using the following links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p47B_a8FHpk (Yolngu Matha version)

References

4. Centre for Disease Control Murray Valley encephalitis Fact Sheet 2013.