

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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For more information contact:

Jamesina J. Scott, Ph.D.
District Manager and Research Director
Lake County Vector Control District
(707) 263-4770

Karen Tait, M.D.
Health Officer
Lake County Health Services
(707) 263-1090

Officials Urge Travelers to be Aware of Zika Virus Risks

LAKE COUNTY, Calif. (February 19, 2016) – Travelers to Latin America and other parts of the world need to be aware of health risks posed by the Zika virus – an infection transmitted through mosquito bites that has recently enlarged its territory to Latin American countries, including Mexico.

The infection was previously associated with travel to other countries with outbreaks, such as areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Its appearance in Latin American countries brings the disease potential closer to home.

The illness is usually mild and symptoms of Zika virus infection typically begin 3-7 days after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito. Lasting several days to a week, symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain and redness of the eyes. There is no specific treatment for the infection.

Of greatest concern is the association of a serious birth defect known as microcephaly (abnormally small head and brain) in newborns born to women infected with Zika virus while pregnant.

Zika virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes. While these species of mosquito are not yet found in Lake County, they have been detected in 12 California counties.

According to Lake County Vector Control District Manager and Research Director, Dr. Jamesina Scott, “We all can take simple steps to reduce the spread of mosquitoes and prevent Zika virus and similar mosquito-borne diseases from finding their way to Lake County. The most important thing you can do is get rid of standing water in your yard because this is where those mosquitoes develop.”

Transmission of the infection can also take place via blood transfusion, sexual contact, and from mother to child around the time of delivery and possibly earlier during pregnancy.

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika virus infection, so it is important to avoid becoming infected. If you are traveling to a region affected by Zika, chikungunya, or dengue, you should avoid mosquito bites during the day and at night. Recommended precautions include:

- Use an insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or para-menthane-diol (PMD). If you use both sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and then the repellent.

- Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding can and should choose an EPA-registered insect repellent (such as DEET, picaridin, or IR3535) and use it according to the product label.
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If you are not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes inside your home or hotel, sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- Reduce the number of mosquitoes outside your home or hotel room by emptying standing water from containers such as flowerpots or buckets.

Lake County Health Officer, Dr. Karen Tait notes that Lake County residents often travel to Mexico and urges pregnant women and women who may become pregnant to consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.

Tait cautions, “If travel to a location with active Zika virus transmission cannot be avoided, strict precautions to avoid mosquito bites at all hours of the day and night should be followed.”

More detailed information about locations with active Zika virus transmission can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html> .

Travelers returning from areas with Zika virus outbreaks should see their doctor if they have fevers or other symptoms of Zika virus, which can resemble infections from several other related viruses. Doctors should report possible cases to the local public health department, which can assist them with accessing public health laboratory tests for the virus.

Residents can reduce mosquitoes near their homes with these steps:

- Remove or drill holes in the bottom of all plant pots, saucers, barrels, bins, and old tires so that they no longer hold water.
- Do not keep water in buckets; cover trashcans, toys, and recycle bins; and keep unneeded items out of the rain.
- Store canoes and other small watercraft indoors or upside-down so they do not collect rainwater.
- Regularly inspect tarps and dump out the water that collects in low spots.
- Properly seal rain barrels to keep mosquitoes out of the water. Thousands of mosquito eggs can be laid inside rain barrels.
- Contact the Lake County Vector Control District at (707) 263-4770 or www.LCVCD.org for help with preventing mosquitoes in unmaintained swimming pools and spas, stock tanks, ornamental ponds, and other water features that cannot be drained.

A strong program of mosquito control, both community-wide as well as what individuals can do to protect themselves, is the most effective means of avoiding Zika virus and other mosquito-borne diseases.

More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/>

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