



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Missionaries and visitors to the Caribbean are advised to reduce exposure to mosquitoes to prevent chikungunya and other mosquito-borne viruses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne illness that is transmitted to people from the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes can pick up the virus from an infected person and then, during their next feeding, pass the virus on to another person.

Outbreaks have occurred in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Indian and Pacific oceans. In late 2013, chikungunya virus was found for the first time in the Americas or islands in the Caribbean. So far this year, 93 chikungunya cases have been reported in Puerto Rico and 7 cases in the Virgin Islands. Members of missionary aid groups returning from Haiti are among the people who have the illness.

As of July 17, the Alabama Department of Public Health had received confirmation of 3 chikungunya cases, 1 additional laboratory-confirmed test that is not classified as a case (no fever or chills reported) and 2 preliminarily positive test results. All cases are in Alabama residents who traveled to Haiti or other parts of the Caribbean. Florida has just reported the first domestic transmission of chikungunya with 2 cases.

The most common symptoms of infection are fever and joint pain. Other symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling or rash. No vaccine or medicine is available to prevent chikungunya. The only way to prevent chikungunya is to prevent mosquito bites.

“Preventing mosquito bites can be difficult, but it is important because you can get sick after just one bite,” Assistant State Health Officer for Disease Control and Prevention Dr. Mary G. McIntyre said. “Mosquitoes that transmit chikungunya bite during the day, so any time you’re outside use mosquito repellent and wear long sleeves and pants.”

When traveling to known endemic areas for chikungunya including Haiti, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and other areas, travelers are advised:

- Protect yourself from mosquito bites by using mosquito netting.
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks and tents). You can buy pre-treated clothing and gear or treat them yourself.
- Treated clothing remains protective after multiple washings. See the product information to find out how long the protection will last.
- If treating items yourself, follow the product instructions carefully.

- Do **not** use permethrin directly on skin.
- Stay and sleep in screened or air-conditioned rooms.
- Use a bed net if the area where you are sleeping is exposed to the outdoors.

These cases serve as a reminder that people need to protect themselves by preventing mosquito bites while at home and away.

Mosquitoes carry and transmit several diseases that infect humans and animals, like birds, and horses. In Alabama, mosquitoes transmit arboviral diseases including West Nile virus (WNV) fever and encephalitis, Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE), St. Louis encephalitis (SLE), and LaCrosse encephalitis (LAC). Rarely, mosquitoes can transmit malaria, dengue and yellow fever in Alabama. Mosquitoes do not transmit AIDS/HIV, leukemia or hepatitis.

To reduce your exposure to mosquitoes:

- Stay indoors, especially during the dusk and dawn hours when mosquitoes are most active.
- Some mosquitoes that transmit diseases, such as the Asian tiger mosquito, are active during the day, so while outdoors wear light-colored, tightly woven, loose clothing and insect repellent.
- Wear enough insect repellent to cover skin and clothes that contain one of the following EPA-registered ingredients DEET, Picaridin, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus/PMD or IR3535.
 - o Contact your health care provider with concerns about repellents.
 - o Do not use repellents under clothing.
 - o Never use repellents over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
 - o Spray repellent on hands first and then apply it on children and faces. Do not apply to eyes or mouth and apply sparingly around ears.
 - o After returning indoors, wash treated skin and clothes with soap and water.
 - o Remember to reapply insect repellent when going back outdoors.
- Keep window and door screens shut and in good condition. Repair holes.
- Inspect your yard for places a mosquito could use to breed. Eliminate breeding sites.
 - o Dispose of containers that collect water, like buckets, cans, bottles and jars.
 - o Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets, unclog drains and gutters.
 - o Empty and scrub birdbaths, pet bowls and animal troughs to get rid of mosquito eggs.
 - o Dispose of unused tires. Overturn or store under cover wheelbarrows, tubs and wading pools when not in use.
 - o Keep weeds, vines and grass trimmed.
 - o Fill tree holes with sand or mortar.
 - o Change water in flower vases and pots twice weekly.

Where can I find more information?

- Go to cdc.gov and type Arboviral in SEARCH box.