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Contact: Chris Tittel
(305) 809-5653 / (305) 924-6839

CDC officials lend support to local dengue prevention campaign

Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention visited Key West on Monday and Tuesday as a show of support for local efforts to raise awareness to the presence of dengue.

Dr. Kay Tomashek and Dr. Christopher Gregory, both of the CDC Dengue Branch in Puerto Rico, made the side trip to Key West following a conference in Fort Lauderdale.

During a two-hour meeting on Monday morning, Tomashek told Monroe County Health Department Administrator Bob Eadie, Florida Keys Mosquito Control District Director Ed Fussell and others that she and her team at the CDC are ready to help in whatever way they can.

“We’re most grateful for the CDC’s offer of assistance,” Eadie said. “Any advice that we can get from people who know dengue inside and out is always useful and very much appreciated.”

Health department and Mosquito Control officials have been running campaigns to raise public awareness to dengue, emphasizing the role that each member of the community plays in helping to eradicate the mosquitoes that can bring the disease. Both agencies have made available to the public flyers, brochures and slide presentations that can be delivered to community groups, housing complexes, schools, businesses, church groups and others.

Dengue first appeared in Key West in August 2009. The health department reported 22 confirmed cases of the mosquito-borne illness into mid-October. No additional cases were reported again until mid-April. Since then, the health department has confirmed two more cases.

Tomashek said that as the public campaign builds, special efforts should be made to educate physicians on symptoms of the disease, testing procedures and the role that they play in promoting the prevention message.

“Getting physicians on board with the prevention message, encouraging them to tell patients to dump water and wear repellents and giving them information that they can post in their waiting rooms will certainly help get the word out,” Tomashek said.

It’s an approach that Tomashek said is just starting to be taken in Puerto Rico, where thousands of cases of dengue are reported each month.

“The message is the same anywhere dengue is present,” Tomashek said. “Each of us must take responsibility for our own health, dump standing water in manmade containers in and around our properties, wear mosquito repellents and make sure screens on windows and doors don’t have holes in them.”

On Tuesday morning, Tomashek and Gregory boarded an FKMCD helicopter for an overhead tour of Old Town and sites where confirmed cases of dengue have been reported. Tomashek was later interviewed in studio on Mosquito Control TV. The broadcast is scheduled to air at 7 p.m. on Wednesday on Comcast Channel 5.

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