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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RAISES AWARENESS OF CHIKUNGUNYA FEVER

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Health advises residents and visitors to be aware of chikungunya fever, a viral mosquito borne disease that has made its way to the Caribbean countries from Africa, Asia and islands in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. Travelers to these countries could carry the virus back to the United States and infect local mosquito populations.

"With a large number of people travelling to and from the Caribbean in Florida we have been monitoring for possible imported cases," said Dr. Carina Blackmore, State Public Health Veterinarian and Deputy State Epidemiologist. "We encourage all Floridians to practice the drain and cover method to minimize mosquito exposure."

Mosquitoes can transmit different viruses including chikungunya, West Nile and Eastern equine encephalomyelitis. Chikungunya, like dengue, can be transmitted from an infected human to an Aedes mosquito which in turn can bite another human and pass along the disease. Aedes mosquitoes are day biters which can lay eggs in very small water containers. Early detection of the symptoms and preventing mosquitoes from biting will help prevent the disease from spreading in the United States. During times of increased mosquito activity, local mosquito control districts will treat accordingly to ensure the safety of communities.

The Department has received three reports of imported cases of chikungunya fever to Florida from travelers who recently traveled to the Caribbean. One case is a 30 year old woman in Miami-Dade County, one case is a 29 year old woman from Broward County, and the other is a 44 year old woman in Hillsborough County.

Symptoms of chikungunya usually begin 3-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and can include fever and severe joint pains often in hands and feet. Other symptoms can include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling or rash. Chikungunya fever does not often result in death, but some individuals may experience persistent joint pain. There is currently no vaccine or medication to prevent chikungunya fever. If you feel that you may have contracted chikungunya, see your health care provider. People at increased risk for severe disease include newborns exposed during delivery, older adults (≥65 years), and people with medical conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease. A person infected with chikungunya should stay indoors as much as possible until symptoms subside to prevent further transmission.

To minimize exposure to mosquitos, practice the drain and cover method. Drain water from garbage cans, house gutters, pool covers, coolers, toys, flower pots or any other containers where sprinkler or rain water has collected and discard any items that may collect water. Clean bird baths and pet water bowls twice a week. If you must be outside when mosquitoes are active, cover up. Wear shoes, socks, long pants, and long sleeves. You may also apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, and IR3535 are effective. Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months.

To learn more about the chikungunya virus, please visit www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/mosquito-borne-diseases/chikungunya.html. For more information in Miami-Dade County, call (786) 336-1276, in Broward County call (954) 467-4784 and in Hillsborough County call (813) 298-2024.

The Florida Department of Health works to protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, & community efforts.

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