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UPDATED: 08/2015

Frequently Asked Questions: Chikungunya Virus

What is chikungunya virus?

Chikungunya fever (CHIK) is an infection caused by the Chikungunya virus (CHIKV). The virus is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito, similar to West Nile and dengue viruses. The Chikungunya virus was first identified during an outbreak in 1952 in southern Tanzania, although it is suspected to have been present in Africa and Asia for much longer. Chikungunya fever outbreaks have been reported in Africa, southern Europe, Southeast Asia, India, and islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In December 2013, a cluster of CHIK cases were reported from St. Martin, an island in the Caribbean. This was the first known occurrence of local CHIKV transmission in the Americas. Since that time, chikungunya has spread throughout the Caribbean and into Central and South America.

How is chikungunya virus transmitted?

Chikungunya virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito, including the same mosquitoes that can transmit Zika and dengue.

Who is at risk of being infected?

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where chikungunya virus is found who has not already been infected with chikungunya virus is at risk for infection.

What are the symptoms of chikungunya fever?

Chikungunya fever can be a painful, debilitating disease but is rarely fatal. An infected person will typically become ill three to seven days after the mosquito bite, but symptoms can begin anywhere from two to 12 days post-bite. The principal symptoms of chikungunya are high fever, severe joint pain (mainly in the arms and legs), headache, muscle pain, back pain, and rash. These symptoms can last 3-10 days. However, some individuals will experience chronic joint pain for months to years and others have reported a relapse of symptoms weeks after the initial illness. The disease is often diagnosed incorrectly because the symptoms are similar to influenza and other viruses.

What treatment options are available for chikungunya fever?

Since there is no specific treatment against the virus, treat the symptoms by getting plenty of rest, drink fluids to prevent dehydration, and take medicines to relieve fever and pain.

What can I do to prevent chikungunya fever?

The best way to avoid chikungunya fever is to prevent mosquito bites. The Florida Department of Health encourages Florida residents and visitors to protect themselves from all mosquito-borne illnesses by taking the following precautions.

DRAIN standing water to stop mosquitoes from multiplying

- Drain water from garbage cans, buckets, pool covers, coolers, toys, flowerpots or any other containers where sprinkler or rainwater has collected.

- Discard old tires, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pet's water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

COVER skin with clothing or repellent

- Clothing-Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.
- Repellent-Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing.
 - Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products are effective.
 - Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months old. Sleep under a mosquito bed net when outside or in a room that is not screened.

COVER doors and windows with screens

- Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

Who can I call to spray for mosquitoes around my house?

In Florida, many counties and cities have mosquito control services. The mosquitoes that spread chikungunya breed in small containers so you can also limit your risk by eliminating all sources of standing water in bird baths, flower pots, etc. on your property at least weekly.

What should I do if I think I have chikungunya fever?

Contact your health care provider if you think you or a family member might be ill due to chikungunya virus infection. Travelers returning home from areas with active chikungunya virus transmission should avoid being bitten by mosquitoes for three weeks following travel, especially while ill, to prevent infection of local mosquitoes.

What is the status of chikungunya virus in Florida?

Chikungunya viruses may be introduced into areas like Florida, by travelers who become infected while visiting other areas of the tropics where chikungunya commonly exists. In 2014, 12 cases of locally acquired CHIK were identified in Florida. No additional cases have been identified since then. There are currently no areas of ongoing, active transmission of chikungunya locally in Florida. Travelers to Florida should always take precautions to protect against mosquito bites (such as repellents) and sunburns (sunscreen, sunglasses).

What is being done to prevent transmission of chikungunya virus in Florida?

Each suspected case of chikungunya fever is tested at the state public health laboratory. County health department staff report suspect chikungunya fever cases to local mosquito control staff to make sure mosquito control activities are put in place. State and local health departments work closely with other parties to make sure people at risk for chikungunya fever as well as health care providers stay informed with the most current science about chikungunya fever.

Can chikungunya virus harm pets or livestock?

There is no evidence to date that suggests that chikungunya virus can harm domestic pets or livestock.

Additional information

For more information on mosquito bite prevention visit Florida Department of Health, www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/mosquito-borne-diseases/prevention.html and www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/chikungunya/index.html.

For information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) visit www.cdc.gov/chikungunya/index.html.

For Mosquito-borne disease and vector surveillance, please visit www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/mosquito-borne-diseases/surveillance.html and www.cdc.gov/zika/vector/index.html.