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Frequently Asked Questions: Dengue Virus

What is dengue virus?

Dengue is a disease caused by any one of four closely related dengue viruses (DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, or DENV-4).

How is dengue virus transmitted?

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

Who is at risk of being infected?

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

What are the symptoms of dengue fever?

Dengue fever can be a painful, debilitating disease but is rarely fatal. Symptoms appear 3-14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito and include sudden onset of fever, severe headache, eye pain, muscle and joint pain (giving the disease the nickname "breakbone fever"), and bleeding. Gastrointestinal symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea may also be present in some cases. Dengue fever symptoms usually lasts 4-7 days. The disease is often diagnosed incorrectly because the symptoms are similar to influenza and other viruses.

Dengue hemorrhagic fever is a rare but more severe form of dengue infection that can be fatal if not recognized and treated with supportive care. The primary risk factor for hemorrhagic fever is previous infection with a different dengue serotype (i.e. getting DENV-2 if you have already DENV-1 puts you at increased risk of hemorrhagic fever).

What treatment options are available for dengue 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. Illness typically resolves within a week. Do not take aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. There is currently no vaccine for dengue and the research has been challenging due to variation in the four viral types, but multiple vaccine candidates are currently in development.

Is there an effective treatment for dengue hemorrhagic fever?

As with dengue fever, there is no specific medication for DHF. It can however be effectively treated by fluid replacement therapy if an early clinical diagnosis is made. DHF management frequently requires hospitalization. Health care providers who suspect that a patient has DHF may want to consult the Dengue Branch at CDC, for more information.

What can I do to prevent dengue fever?

The best way to avoid dengue 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 dengue 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 dengue fever?

Contact your health care provider if you think you or a family member might be ill due to dengue virus infection. Travelers returning home from areas with active dengue 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 dengue virus in Florida?

While previously present in Florida, the virus was eliminated from the United States several decades ago. Dengue viruses may be introduced into areas like Florida, by travelers who become infected while visiting other areas of the tropics where dengue commonly exists. Until 2009, there were no reports of dengue acquired in Florida since 1934. There are currently no areas of ongoing, active transmission of dengue 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 dengue virus in Florida?

Each suspected case of dengue fever is tested at the state public health laboratory. County health department staff report suspect dengue 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 dengue fever as well as health care providers stay informed with the most current science about dengue fever.

Can dengue virus harm pets or livestock?

There is no evidence to date that suggests that dengue 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/dengue/.

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