



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Public Health Officer Cautions Californians to Avoid Mosquito Bites While Traveling

SACRAMENTO – With summer fast approaching, California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith reminds Californians to avoid mosquito bites [during travel to Latin American countries and the Caribbean](#). There have been [increased reports](#) of mosquito-borne diseases, including Zika, chikungunya, and dengue, in those locations. Dr. Smith also reminded pregnant women to consider postponing travel to destinations affected by Zika virus.

“Summer vacation should be about having fun, not recovering from serious illnesses acquired from mosquito bites,” said Dr. Smith. “Perhaps the easiest thing you can do to protect yourself while traveling outside of California is to pack insect repellent containing DEET. The mosquitoes that transmit Zika, chikungunya and dengue are aggressive and bite during the day, so it’s important to use that repellent and to wear protective clothing whenever you go outside or spend time in buildings with open windows and no screens.”

Zika is a viral disease that typically causes fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. While most people infected with Zika virus will not develop symptoms, Zika virus infection has been tied to Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare disorder that can cause muscle weakness and paralysis. Pregnant women and women who may become pregnant should be especially careful because Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause a serious birth defect called microcephaly and other brain defects.

Although primarily transmitted by mosquitoes, Zika virus is also found in semen of infected men and can be transmitted to sexual partners.

Since the emergence of Zika in Brazil last year, the virus has spread rapidly throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Chikungunya and dengue transmission have also been prevalent throughout Latin American countries in recent years, including several Mexican states, many of which are popular tourist destinations.

Chikungunya is a viral disease characterized by acute onset of fever and severe joint pain. Dengue, another viral disease, is characterized by high fever, severe headache, muscle and joint pain, rash, and internal bleeding in severe cases. Chikungunya and dengue are not contagious from person to person – only from mosquito to person.

There is no vaccine against chikungunya, dengue or Zika. Treatments for the diseases include supportive care, rest, fluids and fever relief.

If you have returned from an affected region and have a fever, joint pain or rash within two weeks following your return, contact your medical provider and tell them where you have traveled. If your doctor suspects Zika, chikungunya or dengue, protect yourself against mosquito bites for at least two weeks after you recover. This will prevent the virus from spreading to mosquitoes, which might then infect others.

People who are traveling to areas known to have Zika virus, dengue or chikungunya should take these steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Use insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus or para-menthane-diol for long-lasting protection. If you use sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and then the repellent. Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding should choose an EPA-registered insect repellent and use it according to the product label.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If you are not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes indoors, sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- Help reduce the number of mosquitoes outside by emptying standing water from containers, such as flowerpots and buckets.

For more information on Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses, visit the [CDPH Zika virus information Web page](#).

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