

Churches and Other Faith-Based Organizations Concerning Mosquito-Borne Disease Risk During Travel

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has confirmed chikungunya virus (CHIKV) disease in travelers who visited the Caribbean and other areas where the disease occurs. This virus and another mosquito-transmitted virus called dengue pose a threat to travelers in the Caribbean, Central America, parts of South America, and other endemic areas. The list of countries in the Americas with local transmission of CHIK is expected to grow (the most current information on affected countries is available at www.cdc.gov/chikungunya/geo/americas.html).

Many churches and other faith-based organizations routinely arrange mission trips to international areas where chikungunya and dengue occur. DSHS urges these groups to assure their members and other mission participants are aware of the risk of getting a mosquito-transmitted illness and how to prevent mosquito bites. Tips to avoid mosquito bites are listed below and should be followed to reduce the chance of getting sick.

Local transmission of CHIKV has occurred in Florida, and the risk of establishing ongoing local transmission in Texas exists. Many parts of Texas have mosquitos capable of transmitting both CHIKV and dengue virus. Returning travelers should avoid mosquito bites especially during the first seven days back from visiting areas where chikungunya or dengue occur. The first seven days is the time period when infected people, even those without symptoms, will have virus in their blood and can infect Texas mosquitoes.

A person bitten by a CHIKV-infected mosquito will usually start having symptoms 3 to 7 days after the bite occurs though symptoms can start as early as 1 day or as long as 12 days afterwards. If a traveler becomes ill in 12 days or less following their return to Texas, the person should seek medical care. Travelers should tell their doctors where they traveled, so the providers can order the appropriate blood tests. Information on testing is available from the Local Health Department and DSHS.

Please remember that we have diseases caused by other mosquito-borne viruses in the U.S., most notably West Nile virus. Consequently, mosquito bite avoidance should be an ongoing effort whether at home or abroad as long as mosquitos are active.

To reduce risk of mosquito bites:

- Use air conditioning and maintain windows and door screens in good repair
- Use mosquito repellent on exposed skin – day or night when mosquitoes are active
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- Wear permethrin-treated clothing
- Empty standing water from outdoor containers

Remember, people potentially infected with chikungunya virus should be protected from further mosquito exposure during the first week of illness to reduce the risk of further transmission.