



**CAYMAN ISLANDS
GOVERNMENT**

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cayman Prepared to Combat Zika Virus

The Cayman Islands Ministry of Health and related stakeholders have been meeting to update Government on efforts taken to prepare and respond to the possible introduction of the Zika Virus to the Cayman Islands.

“Research shows most cases of Zika Virus are reported to be non-symptomatic. Only 20% of persons with Zika Virus have shown symptoms while 80% of patients have no symptoms. As such, we must be vigilant but remain calm,” said Medical Officer of Health Dr. Samuel Williams, noting the mild severity of patient symptoms.

The CI Public Health Department has been monitoring reports of the virus since 2013 and although there is a rising incidence of Zika Virus in the Caribbean and the Americas, the Cayman Islands have not had any cases to date.

On Friday, 29 January, 2016, representatives of the Public Health Department, Ministry of Health, Mosquito Research and Control Unit, Department of Tourism, Health Services Authority, Airports Authority and other stakeholders met to discuss the country’s ability to control the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and the possibility of the Zika Virus being introduced in Cayman.

That meeting was held just days ahead of international media reports on Monday that the World Health Organisation had declared the Zika outbreak a global emergency.

“We are aware of confirmed cases in the United States and Jamaica with relevant travel history. With the proximity and transient visiting population from the US and Jamaica to Cayman, all health services providers have been asked to remain on alert in identifying any symptoms presented by patients,” Dr. Williams said. “We must be vigilant, but remain calm.”

Symptoms of Zika Virus are similar to that of Dengue and Chikungunya and include fever, muscle and joint pain, conjunctivitis, headache, nausea and rash. There is no vaccine or treatment; however, symptoms (which last approximately four to seven days) are treatable.

The main area of concern with the Zika Virus is the affiliation with that of Microcephaly, a condition where the size of infant's head is smaller than normal because of slowed or incomplete brain development.

Dr. Williams confirmed all stakeholders were taking seriously continued observance, including surveillance for neurological syndromes and congenital malformations as well as clinical management including follow up for pregnant women and newborns and prevention control measures.

"We are asking the public to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and their families. They can do this by wearing long sleeves and long pants when outside during times mosquitoes are abundant and by always using mosquito repellent containing DEET on the skin. We cannot stress the importance of preventive measures enough. While the Ministry and its affiliated departments will continue to do everything possible to minimise the impact, if the virus is introduced, it will also take personal responsibility from each and every member of the public to ensure the virus is contained," urged Dr. Williams.

Director of the Mosquito Research Control Unit Dr. William Petrie said, "We encourage all individuals to keep their surroundings clean, ensuring that stagnant water is removed or drained on a weekly basis to prevent mosquito breeding sites."

The vector mosquito for Zika Virus is the *Aedes aegypti*, a mosquito that breeds close to where humans live and work. Items such as tyres, trash, open containers and plastic bags can collect water in which the *Aedes aegypti* can breed.

"Cayman is no stranger to mosquito borne diseases. We were well prepared in combatting Dengue and Chikungunya and now we are confident we will have control of Zika if it reaches our shores. The public can be assured full and undivided support of the Ministry of Health," said Premier and Minister for Health Hon. Alden McLaughlin. "The MRCU and members of the local health industry are trained and ready to put into action the procedures necessary to combat the Zika virus. I have no doubts in the level of expertise and attention given to this by all health services providers."

The public will be provided with periodic updates on the Zika virus situation in relation to the Cayman Islands preparedness and any incidences reported.

For further information, contact the Public Health Department on 244-2621 or MRCU on 949-2557.

(GIS)

Side Bar:

According to the Center for disease Control (CDC), products containing the active ingredients DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 offer safe and longer-lasting protection against mosquitoes and are safe for pregnant women to use.

Other recommendations are:

Apply repellents only to exposed skin or clothing, as directed on the product label. Never apply repellents under your clothing.

Never use repellents on cuts, wounds, or irritated skin.

Do not apply repellents to your eyes or mouth. Apply sparingly around your ears. Do not spray repellent directly on your face. Spray it on your hands and then wipe them over your face.

Use just enough repellent to cover exposed skin and clothing. Heavy application does not give you better or longer lasting protection.

After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water or bathe. This is extra important when you use repellents repeatedly in a day or on consecutive days.

If you get a rash or other reaction from a repellent, stop using it, wash with mild soap and water and get medical assistance. If you go to a doctor, take the repellent with you.

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