



Helping You Understand the Zika Virus Threat

Over the past several weeks the media has been vigorous in its news blasts about the Zika Virus. As with any new health threat, it is important that people understand the threat, how it can potentially affect them, and what they can do to keep themselves safe from the threat.

In a nutshell, the Zika Virus is not new, it was first discovered in 1947 in Africa. It has shown up in various other countries over the years, and until the recent outbreaks in South and Central America, it has pretty much just existed as many diseases do. The recent influx of cases has brought it into the spotlight, particularly since they are speculating it might cause problems for pregnant women and their unborn children. In general, however, the Zika virus is a rather mild virus compared to other mosquito-borne diseases, and usually only 1/5 people infected show signs of illness (symptoms are fairly mild and last several days to a week). Research also shows there is usually no residual effect on the person once recovered.

So how does a person get Zika?

Simply put, a mosquito bites an infected person and then bites someone else. Luckily it's a little more complicated than that, because two things have to occur: you have to have a mosquito that can vector (transmit) the virus, and that mosquito has to bite (take a blood meal from) a person that is an active carrier of the virus (a person who was bit by a virus-ridden mosquito). To-date, only travel-related cases have been reported in Florida. A travel-related case means a person was bit by a mosquito while traveling, they brought the virus back with them, and the virus stopped (or died) in that person. If, however, that same person came back home to Florida and was bit by a vector mosquito, which in turn bit someone else and spread the virus, this new case would be a locally-transmitted case, and we have none so far > which is good news!

Should people in Hernando County be worried?

The vector mosquito for this virus is the *Aedes aegypti*, a small mosquito that likes to breed in water that collects in small container-type receptacles. This particular mosquito is not typically found in our county, although our surveillance crew has found them in a few isolated locations. We do, however, have the *Aedes albopictus* which is thought to be capable of transmitting the virus. These two mosquitoes can also vector Chikungunka, Dengue and Yellow Fever. So, we have the mosquitoes capable of transmitting the virus, however, the second part of the equation would be needed as well = someone with the Zika virus active in their system.

Hernando County has no reported cases of the Zika virus, and if this were to change, our department, along with the County's Health Department, have measures in place to respond accordingly. We are staying updated on the virus situation both abroad and locally.

What can residents do to protect themselves?

There is no vaccine or prevention for this virus, so the most important thing to do is avoid mosquitoes! Residents should **check their property for standing water**. As mentioned above, the mosquitoes that vector these diseases like to breed in small areas of water. Their lifecycle is about 5-8 days during the summer months, which means water should be dumped at least twice a week to prevent breeding. These mosquitoes stay close to where they hatch off, meaning they will stay around your house looking for a blood meal or if necessary, pay your neighbors a visit. If, by chance, your neighbor just took a cruise to the Caribbean and brought back the virus, this is a perfect example of how the virus could be spread. Apart from monitoring your property for breeding sources, **protect yourself from getting bit** – follow the 5 D's > **D**ump standing water, **D**eet (mosquito repellents with DEET work the best) , **D**ress (wear clothing to cover your body as much as possible), **D**usk & **D**awn (stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active).