



It has been said that knowledge is power and in the case of mosquito-borne illnesses this information can save your life. What do Dengue, Chikungunya, and now Zika Viruses have in common? These are tropical mosquito born viruses, but it now appears the Zika Virus is spreading globally. The Zika virus is so named because it is believed to have originated in the Zika forest of Uganda in Africa and was first reported in the 1940's. There are currently one million cases worldwide with 29 confirmed cases in Florida and this count goes up daily. The most cases are in Miami-Dade (38%). In Northwest Florida, one case was reported in Santa Rosa County. It is important to note that none of these originated in the United States. Those who have this disease were infected in another country while traveling. One case in Texas was sexually transmitted to the spouse of a missionary upon his return. Once a person is infected they become a host for up to seven days and if a mosquito bites them, the mosquito can transmit the disease to another person.

The Zika virus is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito, or human saliva, blood transfusion or sexual transmission. Blood banks in the United States are safe and do not accept, per FDA guidelines, blood donations from people who have traveled to areas with active transmission of Zika in the last 28 days. There is currently no cure or vaccine. Antibiotics are not effective because it is a virus not a bacterial infection. Once infected with the Zika virus the symptoms begin within 2-5 days. It is important to note that some cases are mild and some experience no symptoms. In the beginning there is a fever, rash, joint pain and red in the white of the eyes. It is important to treat only with acetaminophen (Tylenol) as this an inflammatory disease made worse by such medication as Aspirin. The second stage for the disease includes headaches, aching behind the eyes and vomiting. Bed rest is recommended and hydration. A diagnosis can be made by a physician with a blood titer.

Complications can arise for pregnant women because the virus passes through the umbilical cord. There are currently 9 pregnancy cases in the United States where the mother is infected with Zika. In Brazil studies are underway to confirm that children born to infected mothers have birth defects such as microcephaly. The CDC is working to investigate the link in Brazil. In addition to pregnancy it appears the virus can begin to ravage the nervous systems producing crippling diseases in adults. There have been cases of complications with Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a type of paralysis. In some adults it causes a form of crippling arthritic symptoms.

The mosquito that carries this disease is a common one in Florida known as the Tiger mosquito. Once these mosquitos became infected they become aggressive daytime biters. They can also bite at night. This is uncommon for these vectors, because as most of us know; they feed at dusk or dawn. They have no issues with following you inside of your home where other mosquitoes shun the temperature difference. The Okaloosa mosquito control program monitors 12 trap sites across the county in locations of known heavy mosquito activity. No Tiger mosquitos have been trapped since last October. The Tiger mosquito is rare in the winter time but will begin to hatch this spring and all through the summer and into fall.

What can be done? Okaloosa County will begin an aggressive campaign to destroy mosquitos through spray. If a case is detected in Okaloosa, additional emergency state funds are available to combat the spread. Santa Rosa has already qualified for these funds. Government alone cannot keep us from a massive outbreak. All citizens must partner with the County in this fight. Mosquitos can breed in water as small as the amount found in fallen Magnolia leaves. This is important because no leaf must be left unturned in your yards. Pots, gutters, birdbaths must be inspected for water which are prime breeding grounds. It only takes a few days for larvae to hatch once the eggs are laid in standing water. The Tiger mosquitos do not travel far in their lifespan so truly most hatch and live within a mile of your property. So wear protective clothing and use an insect repellent product with an EPA-registered insect repellent. If you use sunscreen, apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent. Special clothing is made that has insect repellent as part of the fabric for outdoor protection. Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants. Make sure your windows and door screens are in good repair. If you contract this disease you can spread it to a loved one with an exchange of bodily fluid.

The Governor of Florida has opened up an emergency hotline to answer questions or report issues with Zika. The number is 855-622-6735. Mosquitos are a year round problem. In Florida, and especially in Okaloosa, we are actually fortunate that we have such a well-managed Mosquito control program. Working together as a community with our County we can mitigate the inevitable spread of this disease in our area with education and a willingness to understand the historical fight we are in against an insect that continues to reinvent misery under different names.

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