



Kiowa County Health Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Oklahoma Case of Chikungunya Confirmed in Traveler

A Tulsa County resident, who recently traveled to Haiti on a mission trip, is the first Oklahoman confirmed to test positive for the chikungunya virus. Chikungunya is not indigenous to Oklahoma nor to the continental United States (U.S.), meaning people cannot acquire the disease in the U.S. The disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. Persons considering traveling overseas to any Caribbean Island, South America, Africa or Southeast Asia should take extra precautions against mosquito bites, according to public health officials at the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH).

In late 2013, chikungunya virus was found for the first time in the Americas on islands in the Caribbean. Since that time, the geographic range of the disease has expanded rapidly and outbreaks have recently been occurring in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Cases have now been identified in 22 Caribbean and two South American countries posing a greater risk of exposure to tourists and mission workers to that region. With the increase of chikungunya in the Caribbean, more American travelers are being diagnosed with the mosquito-borne illness. To date, 57 cases have been reported in the U.S.

The OSDH and the Tulsa Health Department are working with the family, mission trip sponsors, and health care providers to determine whether additional people in the mission group have become ill with Chikungunya Fever. OSDH advises travelers to affected areas to be very vigilant about regular use of mosquito-bite prevention, including use of repellent containing DEET, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long slacks to limit amount of exposed skin, and ensuring that residences have screened windows or mosquito nets are used around beds.

“Persons developing symptoms of chikungunya, such as high fever, joint pain, and body aches within seven days after returning from an area with chikungunya, should voluntarily isolate themselves indoors for seven days after symptoms begin to avoid contact with native mosquitoes. This action will reduce the risk of introducing the chikungunya virus into Oklahoma’s native mosquito population, which will prevent locally-acquired disease,” said Oklahoma State Epidemiologist Dr. Kristy Bradley.

Most people exposed to chikungunya will develop symptoms. Chikungunya does not often cause death, but the symptoms can be severe. While the most common symptoms are high fever and severe pain in multiple joints, other symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling, or rash. Most patients feel better within one week, but the joint pain can persist for months to years in some cases.

People at risk for more severe disease include newborn infants, adults over age 65, and people with medical conditions that may compromise the immune system such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, HIV, or cancer and others. There is no specific treatment for Chikungunya Fever. Treatment consists of supportive care for relief of fever and joint pain. Currently, there is no vaccine.



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Unlike West Nile virus infection, chikungunya can be transmitted from a sick person to a healthy person by the bite of an infected mosquito. Infected persons are advised to avoid exposure to mosquitoes during the first week of illness. Chikungunya is not transmitted directly from one person to another through contact.

For more health and safety information, contact the Kiowa County Health Department at 580-726-3316 or visit the OSDH web site at: <http://go.usa.gov/9gUY> . This webpage contains statistics on Oklahoma cases of Chikungunya as well as links to fact sheets, information from the CDC and the World Health Organization, and the most recent statistics on cases in the Caribbean islands and South American countries, especially useful for travelers.

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