



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT ADVISES PREGNANT TRAVELERS TO AVOID REGIONS WHERE ZIKA VIRUS IS SPREADING Use Repellents While Visiting Places Where Zika, Dengue and Chikungunya are Common

To avoid Zika and other mosquito-borne viruses, the Westchester County Health Department advises pregnant women to postpone travel to regions where these are common - including Mexico, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Island, Central and South America and the Caribbean. All international travelers are also advised to bring and consistently use repellents that contain DEET or another insecticide proven to help prevent mosquito bites.

“This virus is a concern for international travelers and their families,” said Westchester County Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD. “While the symptoms of Zika in most people are mild, Zika has been linked to birth defects, so it is safest for pregnant women to avoid travel to regions where Zika is prevalent.”

Zika is of concern now in many countries south of the United States with warmer weather and active mosquitoes. Zika is primarily spread through the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which is not found in Westchester. This mosquito also spreads Dengue and Chikungunya, two viruses that are common in the same regions. The symptoms of these mosquito-borne viruses include fever, joint and muscle pain, and headache. Zika symptoms also include a rash and pink eye (conjunctivitis). Chikungunya symptoms may also include joint pain that can persist for months. Dengue symptoms may include mild bleeding.

“Using repellents with DEET and staying in places that have secure screens or air conditioning when you travel will reduce your exposure,” Amler said.

People with Zika usually don’t get sick enough to go to the hospital. Travelers who visit places with Zika should see a healthcare provider if they are pregnant or if they develop a fever, rash, joint pain or red eyes during a trip or within two weeks after they return. There is no specific treatment or vaccine. Supportive care includes pain relievers with acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Until Dengue is ruled out, avoid aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen. (Travel tips follow below.)

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Mosquitoes are not active in Westchester during cold weather. Once Westchester thaws out and warmer, wet spring weather begins, using repellents locally can help residents avoid tick borne diseases and West Nile Virus, which also is spread by mosquitoes.

“Residents should also be vigilant about removing standing water from their property since mosquitoes can breed in the rainwater that collects in an overturned garbage can lid or a flower pot saucer,” Amler said. “The health department has a robust mosquito monitoring system in place. Throughout the spring and summer, the health department collects, sorts and identifies the kinds of mosquitoes found in Westchester. These mosquitoes are sent to the state lab for testing, where the viruses they carry are identified. Should there be any public health concern about this or any other topic, we would alert residents and take appropriate action.”

Here’s how to protect yourself and your family when you travel:

- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If your bedroom lacks screens or air conditioning, sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- Empty standing water from containers, such as flowerpots or buckets on your patio or balcony.
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Buy repellents before you travel. Apply repellents containing DEET to exposed skin, over your sunscreen, and to clothing whenever you go outdoors. Also effective are repellents that contain picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Always follow the label directions.
- DEET is not recommended for use on infants under two months of age. Oil of lemon eucalyptus products should not be used on children under 3 years of age.
- Do not apply to eyes or mouth, and apply sparingly around ears. When using repellent sprays, do not spray directly on your face—spray on your hands first and then apply to your face.
- When applying insect repellents to children, avoid their hands, around the eyes, and cut or irritated skin. Do not allow children to handle insect repellents. When using on children, apply to your own hands and then pat it onto the child.
- After returning indoors, wash your and your child’s treated skin. Clothes exposed to insect repellants should be washed with soap and water.

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