Travelers to the Caribbean, Central and South America at Risk for Infection with Chikungunya

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BURLINGTON – Are you a frozen Vermonter seeking warmth this winter?

The Vermont Department of Health is reminding all people traveling to the Caribbean, and Central and South America and parts of Mexico to take precautions against chikungunya – a virus spread through mosquito bites.

Chikungunya has been found in parts of Africa, Southern Europe, Southeast Asia, and islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In 2013, the virus was found for the first time in the Americas, and has spread throughout the Caribbean, and into parts of South and Central America and Mexico. In the past year, more than 2,000 cases in U.S. travelers returning from affected areas have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Chikungunya infections are rarely fatal, but can cause severe joint pain, high fever, head and muscle aches, joint swelling and rash. The symptoms usually begin three to seven days after being bitten by a mosquito, which is why people are often diagnosed after returning to the United States.

There is currently no concern of local transmission of this virus in Vermont because the types of mosquitoes that carry the virus have not been detected in this area. However, there have been three cases reported to the Health Department in Vermonters who traveled to the Caribbean.

“Currently there is no vaccine or treatment for chikungunya, so we want to urge all Vermonters who are traveling to areas where the virus now exists to take precautions against mosquito bites,” said Erica Berl, an epidemiologist for the Health Department.

Berl recommends using effective insect repellant – especially during the daytime when this type of mosquito is most active - and making sure that doors and windows are screened to keep mosquitoes outside.

Traveler’s health information is available on the CDC website. Please check this site for updates prior to your trip.

People who have symptoms of chikungunya, and have recently traveled to a country where the virus is spread by mosquitos should contact their health care provider. For more information about chikungunya, visit the CDC website.

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