

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING DENGUE FEVER **HEALTH DEPARTMENT ADVISORY FOR KEY WEST**

What is dengue? Dengue is a viral disease transmitted by a breed of mosquito common to the southeastern United States and the tropics. It is not spread person-to-person. More than 100 million cases of dengue occur every year worldwide with year-round cases in the Caribbean and South and Central America. Symptoms of dengue include high fever, headache, pain behind the eyes, backache, joint and muscle pains, nausea and vomiting, and sometimes rash. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should seek medical counsel, although there is no vaccine or antidote for dengue. Care procedures involve common treatments for severe flu cases.

How dangerous is it? Many people are infected and do not develop symptoms, said Bob Eadie, director of the Monroe County Health Department. Others develop severe joint pain, which is why it is also sometimes known as “breakbone fever.” People with chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension or congestive heart failure may be at increased risk of severe disease. Fatalities are rare, less than 1 percent of patients succumb to the disease.

How did it get to Key West? Because Key West has not seen the virus for some 70 years, it was likely brought to the island by either a resident or a visitor who traveled to an dengue endemic area, arrived in Key West and was bitten here by an *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which is common to the area. The mosquito, in turn, transmitted it to other humans. The two individuals with confirmed cases and two individuals with possible cases were either staying in or visiting the Old Town Key West area. All have fully recovered from the disease, according to health officials.

What is being done about it? The Keys has a strong mosquito abatement program and the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District has stepped up and is concentrating eradication efforts in Key West and especially the Old Town area. Health department and mosquito control officials are asking home and business owners to eliminate standing water on their properties. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is a freshwater mosquito, so the best way to thwart the insect’s spread is to eliminate breeding venues. Officials are also notifying residents and visitors because in the unlikely event someone does show symptoms of dengue fever, prompt medical attention can help avoid serious consequences. Monroe’s health department, the Florida Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District are working together to alleviate the threat.

Is it safe to travel to Key West? There are no local, state or federal advisories in place discouraging travel to the Florida Keys & Key West. Many popular tropical visitor destinations such as Puerto Rico and Brazil are challenged with dengue fever on a year-round basis.

“There is no reason to alter one’s lifestyle, but it is appropriate to safeguard against the virus by taking preventive measures against mosquitoes,” Eadie said.

To help avoid getting bitten by *Aedes aegypti* or any mosquito, health officials recommend the use of mosquito repellents that have DEET as an active ingredient. It is important for repellent users to read the manufacturer’s instructions.

Where can I get more information? Visit www.floridashealth.com and www.cdc.gov/dengue or call the Monroe County Health Department at (305) 836-7500.