

Commonwealth of Kentucky
Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Statewide News Release
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DPH Launches Fight the Bite Campaign for Zika Prevention

FRANKFORT, KY (May 9, 2016) - Health and Family Services Cabinet Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson, Department of Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles, and representatives from the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) and University of Kentucky gathered at the Kentucky State University Research Farm today for a Zika prevention event. Launching its "Fight the Bite Day and Night" campaign, participants discussed the state's plans to respond to Zika in Kentucky and emphasized measures to prevent mosquito bites and control the mosquito population locally.

Three stations focused on various topics related to Zika prevention. Guests were led through each display area where subject matter experts provided information on Kentucky's mosquito population; public mosquito control efforts; addressing standing water issues and removing mosquito breeding grounds around the home; and personal protective measures like insect repellent and appropriate clothing. The event also introduced "Marty Mosquito," public health's mascot for Zika prevention and awareness.

"Whenever an infectious disease is identified as a global health threat, people start to feel a great deal of concern and fear what could happen. They wonder if they are at risk; how to protect themselves and their loved ones from getting sick; and they wonder if the healthcare system and public health leaders are prepared to handle an outbreak close to home," said Sec. Glisson, who provided an overview of what the state is doing to prepare for a possible Zika outbreak in Kentucky. "This is crucial in helping people understand the issue and to better direct the public's sense of comfort and personal protection and prevention efforts."

Zika has been identified by the World Health Organization as an international public health threat. There are no known cases of Zika transmission occurring in the state of Kentucky - or any part of the United States - at this time. Zika virus is not known to be circulating in the mosquito population in Kentucky at this time. However, DPH and the Department of Agriculture are working together to respond to mosquito control issues if the virus enters the state's mosquito population as well as emphasize the importance of localized and individual prevention.

"We need every Kentuckian to be a part of this effort," Commissioner Quarles said at the news conference. "Citizens can help by eliminating areas of standing water that could serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes - puddles, old tires, buckets, and any household items that potentially could fill with water if left outside. With your help, we can help minimize the spread of the Zika virus across the Commonwealth."

To date, 6 confirmed cases of Zika virus have been reported in Kentuckians who contracted the illness while traveling to other countries.

There is no vaccine to prevent infection and no specific antiviral treatment for Zika. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain or red/burning eyes. Recent evidence reveals that Zika can cause microcephaly and other fetal birth defects in infants born to women who are infected during pregnancy. Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is smaller than normal. Microcephaly can be found alone or in conjunction with other birth defects.

"Zika virus is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito and is circulating in many areas of the world where Kentuckians travel for vacation, work and mission trips. Though many people affected by Zika only experience mild or no symptoms, the virus poses serious risk for infants exposed before birth due to maternal infection," said Dr. Ardis Hoven, infectious disease specialist for the Kentucky Department for Public Health. "We have been stressing the importance of taking preventive measures, like using repellent and wearing appropriate clothing, and wanted to have this event to demonstrate what we have been saying about prevention."

International travelers to at-risk countries who develop fever, joint pain, rash, or eye burning/redness during or after travel should consult with their medical provider.

DPH and CDC continue to advise travelers to take measures to protect themselves and their family members from mosquito bites during travel and for three weeks after departure from an area with active Zika transmission, such as areas in South and Central America and the Caribbean. More information about Zika can be obtained from the DPH Health Alerts website at <http://healthalerts.ky.gov/Pages/Zika.aspx> < Caution-<http://healthalerts.ky.gov/Pages/Zika.aspx> > .

* Women who are pregnant should not travel to areas with Zika. Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas for business or family emergencies should talk to their doctor or other healthcare professional first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites.

* Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their healthcare professional before traveling to these areas and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.

* Pregnant women should avoid sexual contact with any man who has recently returned from areas with Zika transmission or consistently and correctly use condoms with each sexual encounter for the duration of the pregnancy.

* Men who develop symptoms during or after travel to Zika-affected areas should wear condoms for six months or consider abstaining from sexual activity.

* Men who travel to a Zika-affected area and do not develop any symptoms within two weeks of travel should wear condoms for 8 weeks after departure from Zika-affected area. The duration of Zika virus being present in semen after infection is not presently known.

Additional facts and information specifically related to Zika virus can be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html> < Caution-<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html> > .

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians. < Caution-<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information> >

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