

March 23, 2016

Dear State Park Official,

As the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health and the State Health Officer, I am writing to share my concerns about Zika virus infection and to ask your help in preventing its spread in Georgia.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued travel warnings for dozens of countries and territories in the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Pacific Islands, and Mexico where there are ongoing outbreaks of Zika virus infection. As of this date, **no locally transmitted** Zika cases have been reported in Georgia or anywhere in the United States, but cases *have been* reported in returning travelers.

Zika virus is transmitted primarily through the bite of infected *Aedes* species mosquitoes, which **can** be found in Georgia. To prevent Zika virus from becoming endemic in Georgia and the U.S., the Georgia Department of Public Health wants to advise you of appropriate and effective mosquito control efforts.

The particular mosquitoes that transmit Zika virus are *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*. The *A. aegypti* primarily bites humans and current surveillance data show it is found around the Georgia coast and in the Columbus area. *A. albopictus* is found throughout Georgia and bites animals and humans. Both of these mosquitoes typically bite during the day, especially in the early morning and late afternoon hours, but can also bite at night. *Aedes* mosquitoes are called “container breeders” because they lay eggs in any type of small container (buckets, rain barrels, bottle caps, stump holes, gutters) or small bodies of water (birdbaths, drainage areas). Traditional truck spraying for mosquito control is not very effective for the *Aedes* mosquitoes due to their breeding habits. The spray will only kill flying adult mosquitoes and will likely be blocked by heavy vegetation, trees, and buildings in state parks.

One of the most effective ways to control the *Aedes* mosquito is to eliminate standing water in the vicinity of check-in stations, camp sites, cabins, restrooms/showers, and historic sites. If there are any unnecessary receptacles holding water, get rid of them. After every rainfall and at least once a week, **Tip ‘n Toss**. Dump out standing water in flowerpots, planters, and trash cans and clean out gutters on cabins and park buildings. Tightly cover water storage containers (buckets, cisterns, rain barrels) so mosquitoes cannot get inside to lay eggs. For containers without lids and too big to **Tip ‘N Toss** (bird baths), use larvicides such as mosquito dunks or mosquito torpedoes. For small depressions that can’t be drained (rip-rap at drain outs, small shallow ponds without fish), apply granular larvicides using a backpack sprayer at least once a month or based on the label instructions and the size of the area being treated.

Around campsites and other areas that people congregate, keep vegetation cut low to prevent landing sites for adult mosquitoes. Barrier sprays may also be considered in areas where



people congregate if cutting down vegetation is not an option. However, barrier sprays must be reapplied every three to four weeks (more frequently following heavy rains) to be effective – follow label instructions for specific application information.

Encourage campers and rangers to wear EPA-registered mosquito repellent containing 20%-30% DEET and use mosquito netting or screens at night. Long sleeves, pants and socks can also help protect against mosquito bites.

Zika virus is passed from an infected person to a mosquito through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then transmit the virus to other people. Symptoms of Zika virus infection include fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes), however most people with Zika virus never know they are infected.

There are urgent concerns about Zika virus infection and pregnant women. Zika virus can be spread from a mother to her fetus during pregnancy and infection during pregnancy has been linked to birth defects. Studies are ongoing to determine if there is a link between Zika virus infection and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) and other serious neurological disorders. Sexual transmission of Zika has also been documented.

Please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or if I can provide additional help or guidance. You can find Zika virus information at dph.ga.gov/zika or cdc.gov/zika.

Working together, we can protect Georgians from Zika virus infection and prevent its spread in the state. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brenda Fitzgerald" followed by a small flourish.

Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.
Commissioner and State Health Officer