

Video: Expert on threat of chikungunya virus

July 14 2014, by Bryan Goodchild And Lisa M. Larson

With a handful of New Englanders having recently contracted the mosquito-borne disease called chikungunya, should Massachusetts residents be worried about catching it?

Infectious disease expert Sharone Green, MD, associate professor of medicine, said local residents do not have to worry about contracting the [virus](#) at home, but must take the threat seriously if they plan to travel to the Caribbean or other places where it is endemic.

"Reports of [chikungunya](#) in Boston shouldn't cause a huge amount of alarm that we're going to have it here," Dr. Green said, explaining that the local cases were contracted by travelers to the Caribbean, which is experiencing a huge spike in cases.

Travelers should be aware that the virus is carried by the Aedes mosquito, which also transmits the [dengue virus](#), and bites all day long. That's in sharp contrast to the mosquito that carries West Nile virus, which only bites at dawn and dusk. Green is a physician-scientist who studies West Nile and dengue viruses.

"It's important to wear long sleeves, long pants and insect repellent during the daytime when traveling to areas endemic for chikungunya," Green said. The disease was originally known to exist in Africa, Southern Europe, Southeast Asia and the islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. But since late 2013, tens of thousands of cases have been reported in the islands of the Caribbean, Central America and South America.

Symptoms, which begin three to seven days after being bit by an infected mosquito, include fever, severe joint pains, headache, muscle pain, joint swelling and rash. There are no antiviral medicines to treat the virus. Most people feel better in a week, although some may develop longer-term joint pain. People at increased risk for severe disease include newborns exposed during delivery, older adults and people with medical conditions such as [high blood pressure](#), diabetes or heart disease.

Provided by University of Massachusetts Medical School

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