

Five things you need to know about the Chikungunya virus

January 29 2015, by Ileana Varela



Aedes aegypti, a type of mosquito common in South Florida, can spread the Chikungunya virus.

It's no secret that mosquitos are a huge headache for residents in South Florida. But what appears to be a routine mosquito bite could wind up being something much worse.

Celebrity and party girl extraordinaire Lindsay Lohan found that out the hard way during her holiday vacation to Bora Bora, where she contracted

a nasty virus called Chikungunya. She ended up in the hospital after returning to London with a fever and serious joint pains.

What is Chikungunya? How did she get it? Is there a treatment? A cure?

We asked Dr. Aileen Marty, professor of infectious diseases at the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, to help us answer five common questions about Chikungunya:

1. How to say it?

Think "chicken," even though it has nothing to do with chickens. More on that later. It's pronounced: "Chicken-Gun-Ye".

2. What causes it?

Mosquitos! Lohan, star of the film *The Parent Trap*, would have been better off with a mosquito trap. Chikungunya is a viral infection primarily spread by two types of mosquitos: *Aedes aegypti* (pictured above) and *Aedes albopictus*.

3. Where can you get it?

You don't have to go all the way to Bora Bora. We have it right here in our own backyard. Although still relatively rare in the U.S., in 2014 the nation's first locally acquired cases of Chikungunya were reported in South Florida last May. The two main mosquitos responsible for the virus are well-known Florida residents and the disease is rampant throughout the Caribbean, a popular vacation destination for many in the United States.

4. What are the symptoms?

Chikungunya is an African word that translates to "that which bends up" because people bend up with terrible joint pain, one of the most common symptoms. You can also get a high fever, back pain, headache, weariness and sometimes a rash.

"If you are very unlucky, you can get massive bruising and leaky blood vessels and—uncommonly—it can kill you," Marty says.

Fortunately, most people feel better in a week, but the joint pain can last for months, even years.

5. How do you treat it?

You can treat the different symptoms, but there's no specific treatment to get rid of the virus. And there is no vaccine.

Be thankful it's not mosquito season.

Provided by Florida International University

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