



ZIKA HAS ARRIVED IN SAN DIEGO

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The Zika virus has arrived in San Diego and Point Loma Nazarene University Biology and Nursing Professors David Cummings and Jen King, believe there is reason to worry.

The Zika virus was discovered in the 1950s in Uganda but the virus did not appear in the Americas until a recent epidemic in Brazil during the summer of 2015. The *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, the carrier of the virus, was reproducing at higher rates due to issues in sanitation in Brazil, causing the outbreak, according to Cummings and King. All the rivers that used to flow stopped and became stagnant water, a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes.

There are many theories as to how Zika crossed the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas, but PLNU nursing professor Jen King believes it is related to the ease of human global travel. “Borders don’t care about transmitting viruses,” said King. “You can cross a border as long as you have a legal passport. No one is going to check you for Zika.”

No mosquito-transmitted Zika cases have been reported in San Diego but there has been a sexually transmitted case in San Diego’s Skyline community and cases reported for returning travelers.

Only 20 percent of people show symptoms of being positive for Zika, according to King. She says the symptoms may be fever, body aches, rash, joint discomfort and most severely progressive paralysis that last for two to four weeks, but this symptom is extremely rare.

“Most people will chalk it up to having a little virus,” said King. “You might think you got a bug on the airplane. You may not think Zika but you should.” This summer, there were Zika outbreaks in Puerto Rico and in Florida and more than 18,000 cases of Zika have been reported in the United States alone. Though Zika is found primarily in South America, King says there is now a rise in cases in tropical destinations such as Hawaii, the South Pacific and Polynesia from the mosquito itself where trade and travel is prominent and where climates support the reproduction of mosquitos.

“Unfortunately the last two weeks our weather in San Diego has been rainy, humid and muggy. A perfect environment for Zika,” said King. PLNU biology professor David Cummings says that San Diego’s best chance at keeping Zika case numbers small is to eliminate standing water. “Pooled water from rains need to be removed as soon as possible since mosquito larvae can hatch in a matter of days,” said Cummings. “Limiting mosquito breeding grounds is our best defense in San Diego to limit the local spread of Zika virus.”

Last month, San Diego Public Health reported the Zika case count in San Diego was 22 and is expected to keep rising. Bruce Kunkel, Associate Vice President for PLNU Campus Services and Sustainability said that Campus Facilities is doing their best to remove standing water on campus. “We always try and be aware of any standing water issues. This has been true with West Nile but even more so now with Zika,” said Kunkel. “When standing water is found our policy is to eliminate them. If students become aware of any pools of standing water please ask them to notify Campus Facilities.”

King says that fluids, Tylenol and other means of supportive care are all that can be done for someone who has already contracted Zika. Much like if you had the flu, there’s not much else to do except to let the virus run its course. The problem is, according to King, Zika can reside in a human body for at least the life of a person’s blood cells, but in men Zika will reside in semen for a minimum of 90 days, maybe even up to six months. “The sexual transmission is the real issue,” said King.

Cummings adds, “At greatest risk are unborn children if a pregnant woman becomes infected with Zika virus. Some babies are being born with abnormally small heads and brains, a condition known as microcephaly, which can lead to developmental disorders or even death.”

Cummings and King stress the importance of educating students at PLNU about the virus. “We talk about all communicable diseases including Zika,” said King of the nursing program. Cummings adds, “It’s an important part of any public health program to educate residents of the health risks that are common locally. When an uncommon health risk, like Zika, comes with greater than usual risks to the individual, education is likewise important.”

San Diego County is focusing on preventative measures regarding the Zika virus. City water fountains have been shut off and drained, San Diego’s blood bank has begun screening processes for Zika in blood transfusions and San Diego’s Vector Control Group has begun spraying Skyline and other communities for Zika.

“Students bitten during the daytime, rather than at dusk like most, or who are traveling abroad should know the risks of Zika and get checked,” said King. “It’s silent and invisible. There are many cases in San Diego that we probably don’t know about yet.”