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Travelers can reduce the risk of local Zika virus transmission by preventing mosquito bites

Johnson County, Kan. (Aug. 1, 2016) – Travelers making their way to Rio de Janeiro for the Olympic Games or other places with a high rate of Zika virus infection, like Puerto Rico, can reduce the chances of Zika virus spreading locally by preventing mosquito bites during and after their trip.

Four out of five people who are infected with Zika virus do not have symptoms. For this reason, travelers returning from places where the Zika virus is more prevalent should wear mosquito repellant consistently for three weeks after they return home, says Lougene Marsh, director of the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment. That way, if they happen to carry the virus, local mosquitoes won’t bite them and spread the virus to others, she adds.

To date there are three confirmed cases of travel-associated Zika virus infection in Johnson County. The department is conducting a mosquito surveillance project to assess the risk of Zika transmission in the county. So far, only one of the species that can carry Zika, the Aedes albopictus, or the Asian Tiger mosquito, has been present in local samples. Because this species feeds on the blood of animals as well as people, it poses less of a threat than the other Zika vector, Aedes aegypti, which prefers human blood.

“Even though one of the mosquito species that can transmit Zika is present in Johnson County, the risk of local transmission remains very low,” says Marsh. She urges anyone traveling to a place with ongoing Zika virus transmission to be vigilant about protecting themselves from mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellant with DEET
- Wear long sleeves and pants
- Stay in places with air conditioning and use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.

Pregnant women should avoid traveling to any place with active Zika virus transmission (including the CDC’s designated area north of Miami, Fla.) and should use condoms for the duration of their pregnancy if their sex partner has traveled to or lived in a place with Zika virus transmission. Local residents can help reduce mosquito populations around their home by removing standing water from flower pots, bird baths, gutters and downspouts and other objects that collect water like buckets and old tires.

For additional information about Zika, visit http://www.cdc.gov/zika/

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About Johnson County, Kansas

Located in the southwestern quadrant of the Kansas City Metropolitan Region, Johnson County, Kansas is a community of choice with a current population of more than 570,000, making it the most populated of the 105 counties in Kansas, but traditionally having the lowest mill levy in the state. For more information visit the county’s website at www.jocogov.org.