

# Tips to protect against Zika

By Lorri Coop

With mosquito season in full force in Texas and the Zika virus becoming an increasing threat to the health of unborn babies in Texas, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has stepped up efforts to educate the public on ways to protect themselves from becoming infected with this new mosquito-

“While people enjoy outdoor activities and travel this summer, it’s important to remember that our first line of defense against Zika is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes,” said Dr. Sonja Swiger, AgriLife Extension entomologist at Stephenville.

Here are some simple ways to protect you and your family from infection:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent every time you go outside. Choosing an EPA-registered repellent ensures the EPA has evaluated the product for effectiveness. If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second.

- Always follow the product label instructions when applying insect repellent to children. Do not use insect repellent on babies younger than two months old. Instead, cover crib, stroller, or baby carrier

- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting pants and long-sleeve shirts that cover exposed skin.

- Make sure screens are in

good repair if you open windows or close windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your home.

- Cover trash cans or containers where water can collect.

- Remove standing water in and around the home from old tires, planters, or any other containers that can hold water. Mosquito dunks, which can be found in any home and garden center, effectively control mosquito larvae in places where water cannot be drained and are not harmful to fish or other aquatic organisms.

- Change the water in children’s pools and bird baths several times a week and the water in pet

- Screen rain barrels and openings to water tanks or wells.

“Anything that holds water should be dumped or treated”, said Dr. Mike Merchant, AgriLife Extension urban entomologist at Dallas. “Small containers can hold enough water to breed mosquitoes. Aedes mosquitoes don’t travel far from their larval habitat, so if you’ve got them, chances are you unknowingly raised them.”

“It’s the global world we live in today,” Swiger said. “As people travel and return from areas affected by Zika, some will return carrying the virus. When Aedes mosquitoes bite infected people, they acquire the virus. The mosquito then transmits it to

an uninfected person, passing the virus to them.”

To avoid infecting local mosquitoes, people who travel to areas with active Zika transmission should apply insect repellent every time they go outside for at least three weeks after they return to Texas – and longer if they develop an illness that

could be Zika.

According to the Department of State Health Services, Texas has had 97 reported cases of Zika virus disease to date.

This count includes three pregnant women, one infant infected before birth, and one person who had sexual contact with a traveler.

Currently, there is no vaccine or treatment for the Zika virus. Controlling mosquitoes and taking steps to protect against infection are the best ways to defend against the Zika virus. More information can be found at the following websites: [Preventingzika.org](http://Preventingzika.org) or [Livestockvetento.tamu.edu](http://Livestockvetento.tamu.edu).