

HARRIS COUNTY HAS ITS FIRST CASE OF THE ZIKA VIRUS

BY DIANNA WRAY

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2016 | 3 DAYS AGO



Photo from Centers for Disease Control

Harris County just got its first case of the Zika virus.

On Monday the Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services sent out a release stating that the Centers for Disease Control has confirmed that a person who recently returned from Latin America to Harris County came back with the Zika virus.

The disease is spread by the Aedes species of mosquito, a mosquito that used to only be found in tropical and subtropical areas but which is now found on every continent except Antarctica. It's the same type of mosquito that carries chikungunya and dengue viruses. A mosquito becomes infected when it bites a person who already has the disease. Then it

transmits the virus to other people through mosquito bites.

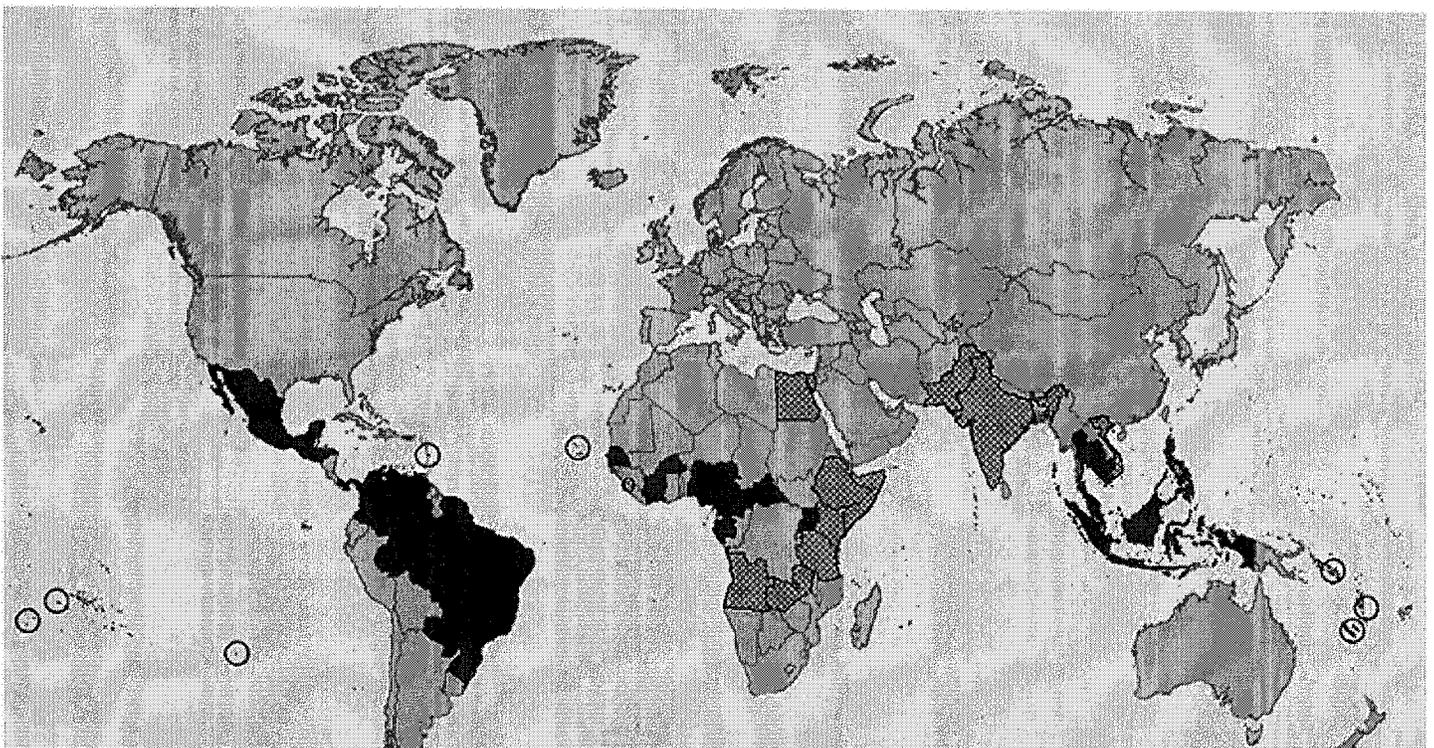
The Zika virus is relatively new on our radar. It was discovered in Uganda in the 1940s. Until last year the Zika virus was mostly confined to Asia and Africa, but then it made the leap to the Western hemisphere. More than one million people in Brazil were infected and now the disease has spread across South America, showing up in Columbia, Venezuela, El Salvador and nine other countries, according to the CDC. The first recorded case in Puerto Rico surfaced at the end of December.

The disease itself isn't supposed to be that bad, relatively speaking. The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness that includes a rash, fever and joint pain, and the flu-like symptoms generally last about a week but the virus isn't life threatening, according to the CDC.

However, the outbreak has caused a panic in Brazil because researchers say the Zika virus may be tied to microcephaly, a condition where babies are born with abnormally small heads and incomplete brain development, according to Vox. In 2015, Brazil saw more than 1 million cases of Zika and then a few months later there were about 3,000 babies born with microcephaly, about ten times the number of cases usually seen in the country each year. There's also a possibility that Zika causes Guillain-Barré syndrome and it has been linked to seven deaths, Vox reports.

Of course this isn't Harris County's first rodeo with a tropical disease. Chikungunya showed up in travelers and then briefly in the Harris County mosquito population back in 2014, as we wrote in our cover story, "Bad Blood." So far the Zika virus hasn't made that leap to the local mosquito population. Fingers crossed that it never does.

Meanwhile, Dr. Umair Shah, executive director of Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, advises people traveling to areas where the disease has been identified, especially pregnant women, to protect themselves against mosquito bites and to contact a doctor immediately if they develop Zika-like symptoms. "Prevention is key to reducing the risk of Zika virus infection," he stated.





The CDC map shows where the disease has turned up so far.

Image from the Centers for Disease Control

Contact: Dianna Wray Follow: Houston Press Houston Press

Sponsor Content

©2016 Houston Press, LP. All rights reserved.