

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT – AUGUST 12, 2016

Hello, this is Tom Schallert from the Northern California Community Blood Bank with a Community Comment.

The Zika Virus was predicted to head north into the USA this summer. It has arrived and according to Tom Frieden, Center for Disease Control Director, “It is unlikely that we’ll ever know exactly who brought it in or where they brought it in from.”

Zika has spread into Florida and is now forecasted to spread across the southern tier of states and perhaps as far north as San Francisco in the west and Washington D.C. in the east.

Zika Virus is a threat to humans. For many people, there are no symptoms but it can cause fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis. It is known to cause severe birth defects in unborn infants which include Microcephaly (small brain) as well as other brain and spinal conditions as well as death.

The most common carrier of the virus is *Aedes Aegypti*, a small dark mosquito with white markings and banded legs. It can also be carried by *Aedes Albopictus*. These mosquitoes prefer warm tropical environments but seemingly are becoming more tolerant of cooler climates as well. The female is the biter and most frequently bites in the day time.

These mosquitoes typically lay their eggs in and near standing water in things like buckets, bowls, animal dishes, flower pots, vases and old tires.

The best defense against the spread of Zika Virus is an educated and prepared public. Use mosquito repellent and if you visit Zika Endemic Areas, sleep indoors in screened and air conditioned rooms. Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. If you are a male who has traveled to endemic areas use a condom during sex because you may be able to transmit the virus up to 6 months after being infected.

The campaign a few years ago to reduce West Nile Virus is still valid today. If you have standing water in or around your home “Kick the Bucket” and drain that water.

I have already mentioned three of the ways transmission can occur, Through Mosquito Bites, Mother to Child and Through Sex.

Blood Transfusion is also probable. An Abstract in the publication, “Transfusion,” discussed a recent case in Brazil where a donor reported a febrile illness including fever, malaise and headaches 3 days after donating. The patient who received the transfusion tested positive for Zika and was with a 99.8% homology between the donor and the patient strains of the virus. The conclusion was “This is a case of probable transmission of Zika through blood transfusion.”

With that possibility in mind, what is Northern California Community Blood Bank doing about Zika? We previously deferred donors for 28 days if they visited Zika endemic areas such as Brazil which has nearly 175,000 cases. Then the Food and Drug Administration shut down all blood collections in

Puerto Rico until a trial test could be implemented. Many blood centers in the USA supplied blood to Puerto Rico until the new experimental test could be implemented and we provided back up products to one of the direct suppliers to Puerto Rico.

With the spread of Zika into Florida, FDA required the blood centers in South Florida to either test with an experimental test or shut down collections. Fortunately, the blood center in Tampa had implemented the test and was able to ramp up within 24 hours of the FDA requirement so thousands of blood donations were not lost.

It is expected the virus will roll across the southern tier of states and ultimately come to California as well. Our blood bank has now implemented a deferral period of 28 days if donors have traveled to Miami Dade County in Florida. We are monitoring daily to see if additional areas in the USA need to be added to our list of deferral areas. We are talking with the testing laboratory regarding their capability to include Zika Virus testing if the virus spreads to our community, which is not very likely this summer.

It is however, essential that blood centers work together to ensure patients who need blood, receive it and at this time not every blood center can test for Zika although all are working to have Zika Virus testing implemented if it is necessary.

As you may have heard, FDA changed some other regulations related to hematocrit deferrals and our hemoglobin deferral rate for male donors went from 1.7% to 4.5%. That does not

sound like much but even for us it is hundreds of donations per year.

As always there are challenges in health care but the fact remains that blood donations are needed daily. Patients have relied on the generosity of our community for 65 years. If you are a blood donor, thank you. If you are not, give it a try. It is safe simple and saves lives.

And to all of you listening, go home tonight and drain that standing water.

This has been Tom Schallert with a Community Comment.