1. What is the current chikungunya outbreak situation in Samoa?

From 24 July to 23 August 2014 there have been 308 suspected and laboratory confirmed chikungunya cases reported to the National Disease Surveillance and International Health Regulations Division of the Samoa Ministry of Health.

Given the increasing number of chikungunya cases, continued vigilance and close monitoring are needed. The Samoa Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners, are working closely together to monitor the situation and prevent and control chikungunya outbreaks.

Two recent deaths that were suspected to be chikungunya have tested negative for chikungunya, dengue and leptospirosis at a reference laboratory.

2. What is chikungunya? What are the differences between chikungunya, dengue and other mosquito-borne virus?

Like Dengue, chikungunya is a mosquito-borne viral disease transmitted through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes. The most common symptoms of chikungunya are fever and joint pain. Other symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling, or rash. Symptoms of chikungunya usually resolve within 7-10 days. Chikungunya is very rarely fatal.

Mosquitoes feeding on infected individuals can become infected and then spread the disease to others. It can be difficult to tell the difference between chikungunya and dengue as they both share some clinical signs. Dengue causes more severe disease than chikungunya and hospitalizations and fatalities are much less common with chikungunya.

There is no vaccine or specific treatment for either dengue or chikungunya. Supportive care includes rest, staying hydrated, and taking paracetamol (or acetaminophen) to reduce pain and fever. Prevention involves protecting yourself from mosquito bites.

3. Are the general population and participants for UN conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at risk of infection with the chikungunya virus?

Yes. But standard measures to avoid mosquito exposure will substantially lower the risk of infection. These measures include:

- wearing light-coloured, long sleeved shirts and trousers, and covered footwear during early morning (6-9am) and early evening (5-8pm) when dengue mosquitoes bite;
- using repellent and frequently reapply repellents as protection reduces over a short time;
- getting rid of stagnant water from places where mosquitoes breed, such as in old containers, flower pots and used tyres; and
• seeing a doctor if you develop any of these symptoms: rash, muscle pain, headache, and joint swelling

4. Will chikungunya continue to spread in Samoa?

The number of cases is expected to increase in the coming weeks, although by reducing mosquito breeding sites and implementing other prevention measures, the intensity of transmission and severity of the outbreak can be reduced. The Samoa Ministry of Health, together with WHO and partners, are actively enhancing control and prevention measures.

5. Is it safe to travel to Samoa and other Pacific Islands?

WHO does not recommend any travel restrictions with respect to the chikungunya outbreak in Samoa and other Pacific Islands. However, travellers should take precautions to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites including as detailed in Q3 above.

People at increased risk for severe disease are advised to consult their health-care provider, a physician or travel health specialist before travel. The specific groups at increased risk include:

• new-borns
• pregnant women
• adults more than 65 years old
• travellers with pre-existing medical conditions (eg. high blood pressure, heart disease, chronic pulmonary or other serious disease and alcohol abuse)

6. What has the local health authority done to prevent and control chikungunya outbreak?

The Samoa Ministry of Health, together with WHO and other partners, is implementing an enhanced syndromic surveillance system one week before, during and one week after the SIDS forum. This is an early warning system for early detection of outbreaks and to implement appropriate response and control measures.

The following public health response and control measures are ongoing:

• focal residual spraying around homes of chikungunya cases, Samoa airport, hospitals, SIDS venues and accommodation sites;
• routine ongoing ULV space spraying around SIDS venues to begin next week;
• surveillance of mosquito populations and breeding sites at SIDS venues and major hotels, to identify risk levels for these sites, and to subsequently control any breeding sites;
• a national mass clean-up campaign in preparation for SIDS and to reduce mosquito breeding sites is ongoing;
• treatment guidelines have been developed and distributed to all health professionals;
• community awareness via multi-media campaign is continuing; and
• community mobilization on source reduction is continuing.

7. What role is WHO playing in the response?
WHO has been working closely with the Samoa Ministry of Health and partners to assure a coordinated response to the chikungunya outbreak, with dedicated support in four technical working areas including: surveillance, clinical management, risk communications, prevention and control. Enhanced vector control interventions aim to minimize transmission amongst both the local Samoan population and SIDS Forum participants.

For more information, please contact

Helen Yu
Communications Officer
WHO Samoa
Email:yuh@wpro.who.int
Tel: +685 30087 ext 82608