

Dealing With Mosquitoes

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It seems that every time the news is filled with a new mosquito borne disease, everyone get's all cranked up to go on a mosquito war path. It's an all out assault that most often results in people wanting some level of government to aerially spray or fog neighborhoods for mosquitoes. So before we go any further I'll just tell you that both of those actions aren't really all the effective and have many adverse impacts.

Don't get me wrong, the Zika virus is a potentially serious issue, especially for young men and women in tropical regions. But the virus has originated no cases of US based infection. In essence, it hasn't gotten a foot hold in the states yet. If you want to be concerned about a mosquito borne disease, then worry about West Nile Virus (WNV) or one of the several other mosquito transmitted diseases that are in the state already!

Just to clear the air a little, Zika is transmitted by two species of mosquitoes: the Yellow Fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) and the Asian Tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*). While both mosquito species have been found in Kansas, neither one is very common. Then to transmit the virus, they have to first bite a human that is infected to transmit the virus to a second person. When you have low occurrence of one event and an even lower occurrence of the second event, you probably have better odds of winning the lottery!

Aedes mosquitoes do not overwinter in Kansas. They have to move in each summer from more temperature regions to the south. Our major mosquito species that we deal with here in Kansas are of the *Culex* genus. The *Culex* mosquitoes do carry WNV and encephalitis. All told there are about 50 species of mosquitoes in Kansas. Reducing the risk from ANY mosquito borne disease comes down to controlling breeding areas of the mosquito and personal protection for you. Large area spraying for adults just isn't very effective at all.

Mosquitoes breed in standing water. The type of standing water varies from species to species. In general, any standing water that is present for seven to ten days can breed mosquitoes in the heat of the summer. In cooler weather it may take several weeks. Anything that can hold water like bird baths, pet dishes, even the saucers under potted plants, need to be emptied weekly, cleaned and refilled with fresh water. Look around your property for anything that could possibly hold water for a week or longer. Even sagging gutters can serve as a breeding location for some species. For larger areas that can't be drained, there are products, often called mosquito dunks, that contain a dormant form of a natural control for mosquitoes. You just toss them in the water, they become active and help control the mosquito larva.

The best way to reduce the risk of contracting any mosquito borne disease is to protect yourself from being bitten. We've had a fair amount of rain recently and mosquitoes are out there in good numbers. Keep as much skin covered as you can with clothing. Treat any skin you can't cover with an effective repellent such as DEET. Treat clothing with either DEET or permethrin. Permethrin is an excellent repellent for clothing but can not be used on bare skin (it doesn't work.) These products not only protect against mosquitoes, but ticks and chiggers too.

Mosquitoes are out there and in addition to being a nuisance they can transmit disease, although rarely. Take some simple precautions, reduce breeding areas and protect yourself, but get out and enjoy the great outdoors!