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DENGUE FEVER EPIDEMICS CONTINUE IN OUR REGION

Investigation by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has now shown that the epidemics of dengue fever currently ongoing in our region are caused by two different virus strains, DENV-2 in Yap State and DENV-4 in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Director of the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services is particularly concerned by the newly confirmed occurrence of DENV-2 in Yap because this virus strain has not circulated widely in our region of the Pacific in recent years and thus a large proportion of the population will be susceptible. In addition, the rainy season on Guam has resulted in an increase in the mosquito populations that spread dengue. Fortunately, to date there is still no evidence that dengue is being spread locally here on Guam.

Dengue is a disease caused by any of four closely related viruses (DENV 1, 2, 3, and 4) that are transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected *Aedes* mosquito. Mosquitoes may become infected with dengue virus when they bite a person who is infected with dengue. After about a week of incubation within the body of the mosquito the virus can be transmitted while biting a healthy person. Dengue cannot be spread directly from person to person.

The principal symptoms of dengue include high fever, severe headache, backache, joint pains, nausea and vomiting, eye pain, and rash. Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever, the severe form of Dengue Fever, begins with the same symptoms but is followed by hemorrhagic signs such as easy bruising, skin hemorrhages, bleeding from the nose or gums, and possibly internal bleeding. Unfortunately there is no vaccine or specific medication for treatment of dengue virus infections.

While dengue is not endemic (i.e., routinely occurring) on Guam, imported cases of the disease are occasionally reported in residents or visitors who have become infected while in another country. Unfortunately, *Aedes* mosquitoes are found in abundance on Guam, especially during the rainy season. *Aedes* mosquitoes prefer to remain close to human dwellings and are most active in the day, readily entering unscreened homes to feed and rest.

The Department of Public Health and Social Services requests the community's help in protecting themselves and their loved ones by recognizing and eliminating all sources of mosquito-breeding containers near their residences. This could include:

- Cleaning up of all debris, especially those that can hold water.
- Disposing of any loose tires.
- Cleaning pet water dishes regularly.

- Cleaning, emptying, properly screening or covering of containers used to store water.
- Clearing roof gutters of debris.
- Properly disposing of all bottles, cans, buckets and other containers that can collect water.
- Plugging tree holes.
- Repairing leaky outdoor faucets.
- Changing the water frequently in flower vases.

The public is also advised to wear light colored, loose fitting clothing during outdoor activities as mosquitoes are attracted to dark colors. When practical, wear long-sleeves and pants when going outdoors. Proper application of mosquito repellents that contain 20% to 30% DEET as the active ingredient on exposed skin and clothing decreases the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

Should you have any questions, please contact the Mosquito Surveillance and Control Program of the Division of Environmental Health of this Department at 735-7221. Dangkolo na Si Yu'os Ma'ase.

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Director