

Virus not a Costa Rican concern

By the Retire NOW in Costa Rica staff

The latest outbreak of the mosquito-born zika virus is not a big worry in Costa Rica, unlike in neighboring countries. Consequently, tourists and those seeking a better life are not being advised to take any precautions except those usual to guard against mosquitoes.

The health ministry has discarded 161 cases of possible zika infections since the beginning of the year, according to data provided by the Ministerio de Salud.

According to Daniel Salas, director of the health monitoring unit, the only eight confirmed cases of zika have been discovered in Sámara and Nosara in the province of Guanacaste on the far Pacific coast.

There, six women and two men got the disease. In a couple of cases, the individuals appear to have gotten the disease from Nicaragua. A pregnant woman who was found to be zika positive already delivered a healthy child, the ministry said.

There may be another one that showed up after Salas gave his statistics.

Doctors have said that pregnant women could be at risk of delivering children with smaller heads if infected.

Salas said that the success in killing the mosquito and its larvae has been due to alertness from the communities who had been fighting dengue for years. Dengue is carried by the same mosquito species, and every year there are extensive programs to eliminate the mosquito vectors, particularly in the coastal communities much prized by expats.

Tourism authorities have remain calm and trust the Costa Rica health system to deal with the virus accordingly, so that it does not affect the flow of tourists.

“This is a high sensitive industry and any threat may have a negative impact on

it. However, we are the Central American country that has better dealt with the disease, so we don't see any impact on our business on the short term." said Mauricio Ventura, minister of the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo.

Health workers have also heavily fumigated non-traditional waste, such as old tires, furniture, TV sets and other home appliances where zika larvae grow, he said. There are extensive government fumigation efforts in many municipalities of the country, and responsible tourism operators also have private fumigation schedules at their hospitality sites. Some spray every day.

Private companies have also collaborated by providing volunteers who perform regular street cleanups.

The use of two larvicides have proven to be very effective: Abate and spinosad. The chemicals destroy zika eggs that have been laid on rugged surfaces hard to reach with traditional fumigation.

Zika has raised bigger concerns among population for its neurological effects and that makes people more engaged in avoiding the disease.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that mosquitoes that spread zika usually do not live at elevations above 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) because of environmental conditions. Travelers whose itineraries are limited to areas above this elevation are at minimal risk of getting zika from a mosquito.