Health Ministry declares ‘war’ on the Aedes Aegypti mosquitos

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With reported cases of the Zika Virus in neighbouring countries and further afield, the Ministry of Health and the Environment is leaving no stone unturned in taking drastic measures to keep the mosquito-borne illness at bay.

In an emergency meeting with major ministry stakeholders on Tuesday, Minister of Health and the Environment Molwyn Joseph declared an all-out war on the Aedes Aegypti Mosquito and the dangerous Zika Virus.

Joseph said Health authorities in the region have held joint discussions on the recent phenomenon which has forced them to step up their alert and put all the necessary measures in place to prepare for the possibility of the ZIKV reaching their shores.

During Tuesday morning’s meeting, Joseph called on key health personnel including the Chief Health Inspector Lionel Michael, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rhonda Sealy-Thomas and Neil
Forrester from the Antigua and Barbuda Hotels and Tourists Association to give their take on the best way forward as he prepares to present to Cabinet tomorrow (Wed), the grave and urgent steps which Antigua and Barbuda must take to protect against the Zika Virus.

‘I want it to be known that this minister of health is not fiddling around when it comes to this very important matter”, Joseph emphasized. We not only want to carry the message out there about the Zika Virus we want it to penetrate the minds of the people that we have to declare war and do our part individually to get rid of these mosquitoes,” Joseph emphasized.

Among the initiatives the Minister announced to combat mosquito infestation are increased fogging, the removal of derelict vehicles from the country’s landscape, closer collaboration with local hotels to ensure that the correct vector control procedures are being used effectively and the inspection of all septic and sewage tanks at Government Schools, Institutions and Clinics to ensure that they are up to standard and do not pose a risk for breeding mosquitoes.

According to Minister Joseph, although keen attention is being paid to every nook and cranny which could be a possible breeding ground for the Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes in particular, all other mosquitoes are still being targeted in this intense vector control exercise.

He said abandoned property as well will come under the microscope as plans are in motion for the removal of old abandoned houses and structures across the country particularly in the St John’s area, which has not only become a public nuisance but a health risk.
Minister Joseph also revealed that the Junk yard owners will be called upon to exercise strong vector control measures in their business operation or face certain consequences.

Michael who concurred with the Minister’s plans for the removal of derelict vehicles assured the meeting that the Central Board of Health (CBH) will begin a vigorous exercise of marking a red X on all abandoned vehicles that qualifies for removal after notifying owners of the impending action.

The issue of used tyres also came up for discussion noting their natural inclination to attract mosquitoes.

Persons engaged in using used tyres for play ground activity are being urged to bore holes in them so that they do not hold water which will be ideal for Mosquito breeding.

Michael further assured the nation that intensified vector control response has been initiated in
the various zones with special emphasis on high density areas.

The Chief Medical Officer meanwhile underscores the importance of vector control programs in the hotels and other areas where tourists reside.

Although it has been confirmed that a number of hotels have an active vector control programmes in place, there is a call for each hotel to have a vector control strategy which is approved by the CBH.

Dr. Sealy-Thomas also appealed to pregnant women to take caution against being bitten by the Aedes Aegypti mosquito by wearing protective clothing and the use of bed nets.

The use of mosquito screens for doors and windows is also being encouraged.

On hand as well at the emergency meeting were Winston Thomas of Bryson’s Shipping, Maria Blackman of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, James Knight- International Health Regulations Implementation Officer, Deputy Health Inspector-Sharon Martin, Colin O’Keeffe of the Health Information Department, Jerome Green and Ian Bailey of the National Solid Waste Management Authority, Permanent Secretary Hildred Simpson, Coralita Joseph , Superintendent of Public health Nurses and Principal Nursing Officer-Elnora Warner.

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