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Chikungunya Virus Outbreak in China Raises Questions for U.S. Travelers

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A recent outbreak of the mosquito-borne chikungunya virus in China has prompted health alerts, but medical experts say the likelihood of a widespread outbreak in the United States remains low. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Level 2 travel alert on Wednesday for the Guangdong Province, where more than 7,000 cases have been reported, according to the Associated Press (AP).

Efforts to contain the spread in China include deploying mosquito nets, applying insecticides, and using drones to reduce mosquito populations. While chikungunya cases are also rising in parts of Europe, public health officials say American travelers should remain cautious but not alarmed.

Chikungunya, a virus spread primarily through bites from *Aedes* mosquitoes, causes symptoms such as fever, headaches, and often debilitating joint pain that can last weeks or even months. There is currently no antiviral treatment available, but anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen are commonly used to relieve symptoms. In more severe cases, patients may be referred to specialists for longer-term joint care.

Dr. Paul Sax, clinical director of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, stated that an outbreak in the United States is improbable. He explained that while *Aedes* mosquitoes do exist in the southern parts of the country, such as Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, the overall population of infected individuals in the U.S. is too low to sustain widespread transmission.

“The reason why we don’t have lots of chikungunya, dengue, or Zika in the United States is that there aren’t that many of those mosquitoes here,” Sax told Fox News Digital. “To really sustain an outbreak of chikungunya in the United States, you need to have a lot more people with chikungunya. And we only occasionally have people with that.”

Sax recalled a recent case involving a patient who contracted the virus in Bolivia and was later diagnosed at his hospital in Boston. He emphasized that even if an infected individual returns to the U.S., it still requires a local mosquito to bite that person and then spread the virus to others, a chain of events he described as highly unlikely.

Two vaccines, IXCHIQ and VIMKUNYA, are available and recommended for individuals traveling to areas where the virus is more common. These vaccines are intended to reduce the risk of contracting the virus and are especially beneficial for those traveling during peak mosquito seasons.

Dr. Neil Maniar, professor of public health practice at Northeastern University, echoed Sax’s assessment. He attributed the outbreak in China in part to the region’s monsoon season, noting that mosquitoes thrive in warm, wet conditions. “We’re seeing an increase in illnesses that are transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks because we’re seeing longer seasons where they can thrive,” Maniar said in a separate interview.

He urged travelers to take common-sense precautions, such as wearing long pants, using insect repellent, and getting vaccinated before visiting affected areas. While the current risk in the U.S. remains low, public health professionals are encouraging Americans to stay informed and proactive, particularly during the warmer months when mosquito activity is at its peak.

The CDC continues to monitor the situation and advises travelers to remain alert, especially when visiting areas with ongoing outbreaks.