

MOSQUITO ALERT

By Eleanor Cicerchi

It's time to take precautions. With the abrupt return of the rainy season, mosquitos are back – including those that carry Zika (*Aedes aegypti* and *albopictus*). Pinellas County Mosquito Control says that the severe drought we experienced this spring, followed by record rains in June, prevented mosquitos from hatching in their usual sequential batches. Instead, the eggs developed in one swarm as soon as they were covered with water. This surge has challenged the Mosquito Control team, which usually tries to respond to calls to spray standing water within 24 hours. These days its spraying program is experiencing a backlog. But a few simple steps can protect you and others from the annoyance and risks associated with mosquito bites.

First, we need to know that many mosquitos lay their eggs in stagnant water, even as shallow as an inch. Others lay their eggs in toys left outdoors, old tires, or other containers that are likely to catch water. Once they are covered with water, the eggs hatch into larvae, then adult mosquitos. It is the adult females that bite humans, because they need the protein in our blood for fertility. The best way to stop mosquitos from breeding is to make sure that the larvae do not evolve into adult insects. Therefore:

- At least twice a week, empty standing water in flower pots, children's toys, plastic wading pools, plant saucers, and old tires – basically anything that catches water. Check bromeliad plants, too. Their cupped foliage can hold water for several days.
- Change the water in bird baths every 3-4 days, the time it takes mosquito eggs to hatch. You can also purchase mosquito rings (one brand is MosquitoDunks), which is not an insecticide, is EPA registered and does not harm any other animals such as dogs or deer).
- For muddy areas and non-draining puddles, even bromeliads, you can use commercial Mosquito Bites, which are also safe for animals and plants.
- Alternatives to commercial products are bleach (1:1 solution – but never if there are animals on your property; empty the stagnant water if you can and spray the container with the bleach solution), cinnamon oil (15% cinnamon oil to 85% standing water) or apple cider vinegar (15% cider vinegar to 85% standing water. *For more information about how to get rid of mosquito larvae, including tips on non-commercial solutions, see <http://pesthacks.com/kill-mosquito-larvae-5-brilliant-tactics/>.*
- Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets.
- Fills holes in trees with sand or mortar.
- Since many types of mosquitos, especially those that carry Zika, like to live right outside your front or back door, pay special attention to standing water near your doors, even small amounts.
- If there is standing water in frequently flooded areas, Mosquito Control probably knows about it. But you can also [contact Mosquito Control service by calling 727-464-7503](tel:727-464-7503).

Mosquitos can carry Eastern equine encephalitis and dengue fever, as well as Zika. The National Institutes of Health advises us to use an insect-repellent containing DEET (except on children younger than 2 months), picaridin, lemon eucalyptus, para-methane-diol or IR3535 when outside for a prolonged period.

Also, avoid bright or contrasting colors and flowered prints, which can attract stinging insects. Perfumes and scented soaps and hair products also attract these insects. And anyone with a severe insect allergy should have easy access to an up-to-date auto-injector epinephrine pen.

Summer is a time for relaxation and fun. A few steps to prevent mosquito bites can make it even more enjoyable.