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Chikungunya under control in Seychelles, contrary to some media accounts

Contrary to some recent media reports, Seychelles remains relatively undisturbed by the Chikungunya virus that has been affecting islands in the Indian Ocean.

Health officials are keeping a close eye on the situation and taking certain measures to control any potential spread of the virus, but life in the archipelago continues as normal for residents and visitors alike.

This is in stark contrast to some international news reports that have inaccurately described the situation in Seychelles as an “epidemic” and the virus itself as an “incurable and crippling” disease.

“When you look at the facts, it’s apparent that Chikungunya has been made to seem a lot scarier than it actually is,” says Dr Jude Gedeon, the country’s Director General for Community Health. “The virus is only ‘incurable’ in the same way that the common cold is ‘incurable’ and there are no lasting effects after it runs its course. While the Ministry of Health has a duty to take the situation seriously, there is no real cause for alarm given our success in containing the virus so far.”

Chikungunya is a non-fatal viral infection transmitted by mosquitoes, which typically brings about fever, joint and muscle pain, a rash and occasionally, nausea and vomiting. The illness is self-limiting and resolves within 4-7 days, but symptomatic treatment e.g. painkillers and rest is recommended.

The virus, which is not endemic to the islands, is believed to have come to Seychelles from one of its Indian Ocean neighbours. So far fewer than 2,000 cases have been reported since the first case in July 2005, the majority of those affected having already recovered.

Preventive measures taken by the Ministry of Health – including the mobilization of community groups to clear mosquito breeding sites and targeted spraying of insecticides – have already led to a marked decline in new cases of the virus in targeted areas, and health officials believe it is only a matter of time before the virus is eradicated altogether.

Given that mosquitoes are primarily active at night and that visitor accommodation in Seychelles is typically equipped with air conditioning, visitors to the islands are unlikely to be affected by the virus.

As always for tropical countries, tourists may wish to bring mosquito repellent for their trip as a precaution, but there are no special travel considerations to bear in mind when travelling to and in between the islands in the archipelago. Inoculations or malaria prevention is not required as Seychelles is completely free of such afflictions.

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