

A Look at the Chikungunya Virus in Haiti (by Ruth McShane, July 7, 2014)

— **WHAT IT IS:** The name chikungunya (pronunciation: (chik-en-gun-ye) comes from the Makonde language of Tanzania. It translates as "that which bends up," referring to arthritis-like aches in joints that cause sufferers to contort with pain. The virus is spread by two mosquitoes, *aedes aegypti* and *aedes albopictus*, both of which also transmit dengue fever.

— **WHAT IT DOES:** Symptoms typically appear three to seven days after a mosquito bite and can include high fever, pain in the joints and back, and severe headache. Many sufferers can barely walk. It is rarely fatal, though there have been deaths among the elderly and people with other illnesses. Symptoms typically last about five days, but in some cases joint pain lasts for months or even years.

— **WHAT CAN BE DONE:** There is no specific treatment or vaccine. People with the virus should rest, drink large amounts of fluids and take acetaminophen to reduce fever and pain. The best strategy is to avoid being bitten by a mosquito. Pesticide spraying in the area would be an option but this not possible at Sts. Simon and Jude.

— **WHERE IT IS FOUND:** The virus has been known for decades in Africa and Asia, but the first locally transmitted case in the Western Hemisphere was documented in late 2013 in French St. Martin. There have since been more than 260,000 suspected and confirmed locally transmitted cases throughout the Caribbean and in parts of Central and South America. The Dominican Republic has reported the most with more than 135,000 cases, followed by Guadeloupe and Haiti, each with around 40,000. The number of cases in Haiti, though, is likely much higher. There have been cases of the virus being contracted by visitors to the region from many other countries, including the U.S.

-**WHY IT IS SO BAD IN HAITI:** Many people in Haiti live in flimsy houses and have little protection from mosquitoes. There is a lot of standing water that creates breeding sites for mosquitoes.

-WHAT CAN WE DO: PREVENTION AND CONTROL

We can pray for the people of Haiti, especially those at St. Jude so that they do not become infected. We can support Nurse Virginia, our Haitian parish nurse, to care for the people of Sts. Simon and Jude by implementing prevention and control interventions. No vaccine or medication is available to prevent chikungunya virus infection or disease

We can reduce mosquito exposure by:

Use air conditioning or window/door screens.

Use mosquito repellents on exposed skin.

Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.

Wear permethrin-treated clothing.

Empty standing water from outdoor containers.
Support local vector control programs.

People suspected to have chikungunya or dengue should be protected from further mosquito exposure during the first week of illness to reduce the risk of local transmission
People at increased risk for severe disease should consider not traveling to areas with ongoing chikungunya outbreaks

Sources: ABC News July 2, 2014 and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Fact Sheet <http://www.cdc.gov/ncezid/dvbd>

We are grateful for your support of our twin parish, St. Jude in Mon Opital, Haiti. You are invited to come and have a conversation about Haiti at these upcoming events:

1. Haiti Twinning Meeting, August 4, 6:00-8:00 PM, Father Herian Hall
2. Missioners presentation, August 24, 10:10-11:20, Lower Church
3. Meet Fr. Roosevelt (Haitian pastor at Sts. Simon and Jude) reception, September 28, 10:30 AM in the Lower Church.

