

Survey results are back from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's dengue research center in Puerto Rico and, out of 240 Old Town Key West residents that gave blood for testing, 99 tested positive for dengue fever or the associated antibodies.

More specifically:

Ninety-one people tested positive for dengue antibodies, meaning that at some point in their lives they had been exposed to the virus.

Six tested positive for having the virus in the past three months.

Two tested "acute positive," meaning they actually had dengue fever when their blood was drawn a month ago.

Dengue fever was first reported in Key West in July. It represented the first documented presence of dengue in Florida in more than 40 years.

Generally speaking, you know you may have dengue fever by getting the chills, headaches, pain when moving your eyes, and pain in the lower back, legs and joints.

Body temperature rises quickly as high as 104 degrees, and with it comes a relatively low heart rate and low blood pressure. You can also get a pink rash on your face, and have your neck and groin glands swell.

"Throughout the tropics, many large cities have endemic dengue," Monroe County Health Department Administrator Bob Eadie said Friday. "They function very well."

He also said of the cases confirmed in Key West, the vast majority have been asymptomatic and treatment has been successful.

Mosquitoes transmit the virus from person to person, like malaria.

Mark Whiteside, the county's executive medical director, said that generally speaking, dengue outbreaks "come in waves. This is our golden opportunity over the winter to see if we can nip this thing in the bud."

Winter is significant, as it is the dry season, which is bad for mosquitoes looking to lay eggs in stagnant freshwater.

"Old Town Key West probably represents one of the most ideal breeding habitats in the country," Ed Fussell, director of the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District, said.

That in mind, he stressed the importance of residents taking steps to eliminate breeding habitat by emptying containers that hold water.

"The key is breaking that breeding cycle, and that depends on public cooperation," Eadie said.

Every year about 100 million people worldwide contract the virus.

For more information on how to protect yourself, call the Health

Department at 809-5653 or the Mosquito Control District at 292-7190

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