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Dengue survey in Cairns reveals lack of awareness

More than one third of Cairns residents still wrongly believe dengue mosquitoes breed in swamps or rivers, according to a new survey commissioned by Queensland Health.

Compass Research's Dengue Outbreak Community Awareness Survey was conducted in 300 Cairns households on the weekend of 21-23 February amid Cairns' worst ever dengue outbreak.

Since the epidemic of dengue type 3 disease began in Cairns in early December, there have been 645 confirmed cases to date.

And Queensland Health Medical Entomologist Dr Scott Ritchie said it was worrying that a significant number of local residents still did not know enough about the mosquito and the disease.

"Dengue mosquitoes only breed around homes, and not in rivers or swamps," said Dr Ritchie.

"Since 1 December, our mosquito control staff have visited more than 9,600 Cairns households and businesses, and cleared or treated more than 36,000 dengue mosquito breeding sites.

"We currently have almost 60 people out in the field removing breeding sites, setting mosquito traps and undertaking interior spraying, but the reality is that we can't be everywhere at once.

"That means that Cairns residents must take action themselves and check their yards for breeding sites.

"We have already had a dengue-related death, and we don't want to see something like that happen again.

"Once again, I strongly urge North Queenslanders to take precautions against dengue fever."

On a positive note, the survey showed that 99 per cent of local people did know there was a current dengue outbreak in Cairns.

The survey also showed that 95 per cent of people claimed to have emptied water containers which could potentially attract dengue mosquitoes for breeding.

However, Dr Ritchie said it was the five per cent of people not checking their yards that was hindering efforts to control the dengue epidemic.

“As the dengue mosquito can travel approximately 100 metres, it only takes one property with breeding sites to put their local community at risk,” said Dr Ritchie.

“The majority of residents appear to be doing the right thing, but we don’t want anyone to let the side down.

“For example, just this week our mosquito control staff found a poorly-maintained property in Manunda with an alarming number of dengue breeding sites, including tyres in a boat and general junk.

“This kind of situation is putting neighbours and the nearby community at high risk of getting the disease.”

Cairns residents should get rid of mosquito breeding sites in their yards, such as pot plant bases, discarded tyres and any other water-holding containers.

People should also use surface spray in their house, wear insect repellent, and see their doctor if they have any of the symptoms of dengue fever.

Symptoms of dengue include fever, pain in muscles and bones, skin rash, headache (usually behind the eyes), diarrhoea and vomiting.

If a person has been confirmed as having dengue, then they should protect themselves from mosquitoes by wearing insect repellent and staying at home as much as possible.

“By doing this, you will help protect your family, friends and neighbours,” said Dr Ritchie.

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Media contact:

Gavin Broomhead 0427 579 219