



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

Statement on locally transmitted Zika cases

By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA

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*Premier and Minister for Health Hon.
Alden McLean*

Unfortunately, in addition to the imported six cases of Zika, the Acting Medical Officer has confirmed that there are at least two cases of locally transmitted Zika Virus.

However, what is fortunate is that Government and the Mosquito Research and Control Unit have been proactive with measures to counter the spread of the virus by killing the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito host.

In addition to enhanced spraying and inspection of yards and increased public education, Government and the MRCU contracted with Oxitec for the use of genetically modified non-biting male mosquitos.

On 28 July, 2016, Government and the MRCU released 20,000 genetically modified male *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos with a kick-off to a campaign to eradicate the dangerous mosquitos from Grand Cayman. This after a Grand Court Judge ruled against any further injunction to prevent the release of the genetically modified mosquitos.

To date approximately 300,000 modified mosquitoes have been released in West Bay as part of the long-term MRCU-Oxitec project.

It should be noted that the locally infected patients are residents of George Town and became ill days before the MRCU released genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos on Grand Cayman. As such spraying efforts have been ramped

up with even more sprayers going out as of Monday night on the streets of George Town.

It is regrettable that despite the very clear public health risks caused from Zika, some in the community chose to try and stop the release of the genetically modified mosquitos.

Their attempt to prevent the release of the modified mosquitos fortunately did not succeed but if it had would have put Caymanians, residents and our visitors at further risk of contracting the diseases carried by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito – chikungunya, dengue and now Zika.

This Government did not act out of ignorance when we approved the release of the modified mosquitos. We had the backing of the World Health Organisation, the MRCU and approval from the National Conservation Council.

Just yesterday we learned that the Food and Drug Administration in the United States determined that the modified mosquitos can be released in Florida where cases of locally transmitted Zika have occurred. That is just further evidence that we were right in our decision to allow the MRCU to take pre-emptory measures to help prevent the scourge of vector-borne diseases.

Many of those who opposed the release of the mosquitos here are already politicians or are political aspirants; people who should be taking public health seriously, not using it as a political platform to grandstand.

Anyone who has ambitions to be a community leader or a Member of the Legislative Assembly must be more objective and thoughtful regarding the stances they take.

They also need to adopt this Government's mantra of transparency. The leader of the campaign to stop the release has yet to openly confirm who or what entity funded the campaign. The public deserves to know the full truth to understand the motives behind the ill-advised and dangerous campaign.

I am especially disappointed in the Leader of the Opposition Hon. McKeeva Bush who as a longstanding member of the Legislative Assembly, former Cabinet member and former Premier is all too familiar with the good work that the MRCU does and that it is the true expert in mosquito control. The MRCU is a major part of Cayman's success story and I have no doubt in my mind that it would not do anything to endanger our people or our country; quite the contrary, as it has demonstrated over and over again.

Instead of continuing to support MRCU in its work to prevent several harmful vector-borne illnesses, the Opposition Leader chose to pull his party colleagues onto the alarmist train in an attempt to stop what may be the best hope for controlling the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and the dangerous diseases that the breed carries.

The increasing numbers of imported cases – six as of yesterday – combined with the locally transmitted cases are proof that the work MRCU, along with Oxitec and this Government are doing is important to the health and wellbeing of all in these Islands.

I want to reassure the public that MRCU, with the unflinching support of this Government, will continue its eradication efforts.