BY JONATHAN BLACK
Times staff writer

Last weekend's rains created optimum breeding conditions for Aedes aegypti, the mosquito that spreads dengue fever. The city of Laredo Health Department is running its mosquito control campaign and is asking citizens of Laredo and Webb County to help by removing conditions that allow the mosquitoes to breed. Dengue fever is transmitted by the bite of a disease infected Aedes aegypti. Symptoms include a sudden high fever, intense headaches, muscle and joint pain and sometimes a skin rash.

There are no reported cases of dengue fever in Webb County this year, but the department's current campaign focuses on prevention, said Victor Oliveros, director of the Health Protective Services Division. The Aedes aegypti mosquito breeds in the stagnant water that accumulates in artificial containers like tin cans, old tires or birdbaths. The larvae remain in the water for about five days before becoming adult mosquitoes.

Since Aedes aegypti have a flight range of about a block, the department says the mosquitoes are very vulnerable to simple control measures. Department officials add that every resident can help eliminate the threat of dengue without using costly or dangerous pesticides. Residents need to examine their yard for artificial containers that could be breeding sites for the mosquito.

Containers should either be properly disposed of or turned upside down to prevent the accumulation of water in them. Residents who keep water in containers for domestic uses are asked to keep those containers covered at all times. Oliveros says that these yard-level efforts have the best chance of controlling mosquitoes.

"The experts say that prevention of the disease by eliminating breeding sites is the best preventative measure," Oliveros said. "It's cheap, it's within everyone's reach, and the mosquito is very susceptible to this type of control." The department is also combating the mosquitoes that spread dengue using an intense anti-larval fogging program in the populated parts of Webb County. The department will maintain its efforts until the threat of the disease disappears.

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