

Jamaica's health ministry, UWI establish mosquito unit

KINGSTON

THE Ministry of Health has partnered with The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona campus in Jamaica, to establish a Mosquito Control and Research Unit.

The unit will be responsible for coordinating best practices in integrated vector management and research into mosquito control and eradication.

An entomologist, who will head the unit, will coordinate work from the resulting collaboration between the ministry's Vector Control Unit and UWI's research.

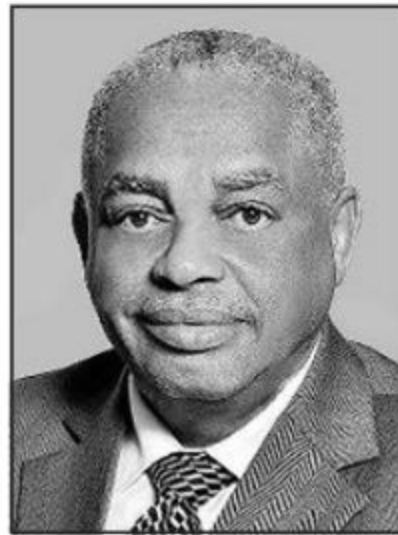
Other stakeholders that will be incorporated include UWI's International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Sciences, Jamaica Red Cross, Jamaica Defence Force and the National Youth Service.

The unit was formally launched by Health Minister Dr Christopher Tufton and UWI principal Prof Archibald McDonald during a ceremony at the institution on Friday.

Tufton said the unit's establishment reflects the requisite coordinated and integrated stakeholder approach to arresting



COORDINATING EFFORTS: Dr Christopher Tufton



PROACTIVE STANCE: Prof Archibald McDonald

the "clear and present" danger posed by the mosquito, the primary vector which spreads diseases such as chikungunya, dengue fever and Zika.

Noting the various interventions being undertaken by the ministry, university and other stakeholders in this regard, Tufton said it can be logically concluded "if we were to bring all of these together and coordinate the efforts, then we would be a lot more effective (in) the control and, hopefully,

elimination of the mosquitoes over time."

Additionally, the minister underscored the rationale for partnering with UWI.

"I have always held the view that the purpose of the university and (other) universities is not just to condition and develop young minds, but to solve problems within the society. In order to solve, or certainly contribute significantly to solving those problems, research has to be done in the context of application," he argued.

Significant rewards

McDonald said recent developments with the spread of diseases by mosquitoes in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands necessitated "a more proactive stance towards fighting the impact of this somewhat resilient vector".

"From dealing with the consequences of chikungunya, dengue and Zika on our population to managing the potentially harmful effects of newly-discovered viruses, the benefits of establishing a unit like this will produce significant rewards in the protection of

national and regional health," he added.

The professor said the launch of the unit provides the country with an opportunity to explore the biological, scientific and social issues that lay the foundation in effective mosquito control.

President of the Jamaica Red Cross Dr Dennis Edwards said the unit's launch is timely and assured the organisation is "open with our branch network across the country to assist and support this venture".

The National Youth Service's senior director for Community Services, Rayhanna Wright, also described the unit as "timely, relevant and of great importance" to the entity, in light of its partnership with the ministry, particularly in the area of initiating vector control and mosquito eradication activities, and public awareness.

"We commit to the provision of volunteers to assist with the implementation of projects (under) the ministry's mosquito search-and-destroy initiative. We look forward to future partnerships, as we work together to continue the empowerment and protection of our people, particularly our youth," she added.