

The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is urging Jamaicans to take measures to ensure the safety of water for domestic use during the dry period.

“We are aware that during the dry season, where there is shortage of water, persons are sometimes forced to source water from undesirable sources such as untreated water wells, rivers, ponds and streams, which can be very harmful to humans, if it is not treated properly, before drinking,” said Mitigation Programme Officer of the Planning and Research Division at ODPEM, Karema Aikens-Mitchell.

She explained that water treatment involves adding drops of bleach, and boiling before drinking in order to prevent diarrhea and other illnesses.

“We are also encouraging persons to practice vector control, while storing water, as a means of eliminating mosquito breeding sites, to prevent against dengue fever caused by a virus transmitted from the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito that can breed easily in and around the home,” she stated.

These practices include punching holes in the bottom of tins before placing them in the garbage, using mosquito repellents, covering trash containers to keep rain water out, and properly covering drums, barrels, tanks, buckets and other containers used to store water.

Mrs. Aikens-Mitchell said that persons should also wash their hands properly after using the toilet, or before handling and preparing food, to prevent the spread of diseases.

The country is now in the annual dry period, which starts in January and typically lasts three months, ending in March. Mrs. Aikens-Mitchell informed that already, there are signs of drought conditions, mainly in the southern, western, and eastern parts of the island.

The agency is urging citizens to practice certain mitigation and preparedness measures,

including reducing lengthy showers, and turning off taps while brushing the teeth.

In addition, limit non-critical activities, such as washing of cars with water hoses, and, instead, use a bucket. Also, limit watering of lawns, and if possible, reuse water from washing machines and kitchen sinks for watering.

Mrs. Aikens-Mitchell also advised that in the event of rainfall, it is important for persons, especially farmers, to harvest as much water as possible and store it in properly sealed containers.

Importantly, also, she is appealing to cigarette smokers to exercise caution, by properly putting out cigarettes before disposing to prevent bush fires.