



Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta, GA 30341-3724

May 6, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

As you are aware, the World Health Organization has declared the Zika virus outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and CDC has activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to its highest level. STD grantees have expressed interest in the status of Zika virus in the United States and questioned whether they should shift their efforts toward prevention of sexual transmission of Zika. We would like to share updates on CDC's emergency response activities, including the Division of STD Prevention's (DSTDP) involvement and key resources and opportunities to help you stay informed, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining traditional STD prevention and control efforts.

Zika virus can cause serious birth defects and can also be sexually transmitted, which presents unique and unprecedented challenges. Zika poses the greatest risk for pregnant women and women who may become pregnant while infected. Zika poses an immediate and serious threat to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and we may see isolated cases and small clusters of infections in other parts of the U.S., where the mosquito that can spread Zika is present. Zika has spread rapidly through 35 countries and territories in the Americas, with nearly 500 travel-associated cases reported in the continental U.S. and nearly 600 cases of local transmission in U.S. territories (as of 5/5/16). There are currently 10 confirmed cases of sexual transmission in the continental U.S., with more isolated cases expected.

As part of its response, CDC has been actively working on the surveillance, monitoring, and reporting of Zika cases; developing diagnostic tests for Zika; investigating the effects of Zika on pregnancies; studying the link between Zika and Guillain-Barré syndrome; investigating possible cases of non-vector-borne transmission, including sexual transmission and transmission through blood product exposures; providing technical and material support to U.S. territories; and educating partners and members of the public, including through a national campaign currently in development.

DSTDP communication experts, in collaboration with experts in the Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention, have formed a Sexual Transmission Team, which operates within the EOC as part of the Epidemiology and Surveillance Task Force. In this capacity, DSTDP has contributed to the development of CDC [guidance](#) and other [content](#) on the prevention of sexually transmitted Zika, consumer research and strategic planning for Zika

communication and social marketing efforts, and the provision of technical assistance to internal and external partners, as needed.

Whereas there may be a role for STD programs to play (e.g., in patient education/communication, condom promotion and distribution for prevention of Zika), we should be mindful that our preparedness and response efforts for Zika may be quite different than they were in other responses, such as Ebola. First, Zika is primarily a vector control and reproductive health issue. In the clinical setting, the most critical focus will be education, risk assessment, and informed decision-making between primary care or reproductive health providers and their patients (both women and their partners) who are traveling, pregnant, or considering pregnancy. Second, contact tracing, which was an essential control strategy for Ebola, is unlikely to be implemented for Zika. Third, there are many health department staff at the state level already working on Zika, including state health officials, epidemiology offices, and maternal and child health (MCH) experts. We encourage you to work with your state health official and link concerned STD clients who have had possible sexual exposure to Zika to primary care or reproductive health providers who can offer counseling and follow-up.

Attached is a list of resources on the sexual transmission of Zika, which includes guidance documents, webinars, and informational materials for providers and the public (English and Spanish). Two upcoming events of interest are the Zika Business Partners Call (Friday, May 6, 2016 @3pm EST), and a Post-Zika Action Planning Summit Teleconference on sexual transmission and pregnancy planning (June 2, 2016 @2pm EST). We've also included key questions and answers for sexually active people concerned about Zika (living in and out of areas with Zika), which will soon be available in poster format. Finally, in response to requests, we've worked with CDC's Communication and Policy Teams to ensure that STD grantees are included on distribution lists for key Zika updates.

If you or your constituents have general questions about Zika, please contact CDC-INFO by phone (800-232-4636) or [submit your questions online](#). You can also sign up to receive weekly Zika updates from CDC's Joint Information Center (JIC) Outreach Team [online](#) or via email at emergencypartners@cdc.gov. Finally, for clinical inquiry and support questions, you can contact eocevent164@cdc.gov and coca@cdc.gov (respectively).

We hope you find these resources helpful and encourage you to use them or work with the leaders in your jurisdiction for local resources and support. Given the unprecedented increases in reported STDs, including congenital syphilis, which few (if any) agencies beyond STD programs are addressing, it remains essential that we remain focused on our priorities of STD prevention and control.

Many thanks,

Gail Bolan, MD
Director, Division of STD Prevention