



Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Shannon Jones, III, Director 
Health and Human Services Department

Date: February 4, 2016

Re: Zika Virus

The Zika virus has been declared an emerging public health threat by the World Health Organization. Because the mosquito that carries Zika is endemic to Central Texas, there is public concern and heightened interest.

We have just confirmed our first positive case of Zika virus in Travis County. The case is under current investigation by our staff. The affected individual appears to have recently traveled overseas.

In Brazil, Zika virus infections have been identified in several infants born with microcephaly (abnormal smallness of baby's head associated with incomplete brain development). On January 22, 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) posted interim guidelines for health care providers in the United States caring for pregnant women during a Zika virus outbreak. CDC is recommending that all pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. A link to the guidance can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6502e1.htm>

HHSD has alerted local health care providers and partner organizations to be aware of Zika as they see patients and to ask about travel history. HHSD works with providers to help them assess the need for laboratory testing and facilitate testing from the Centers for Disease Control as needed. Right now, human testing for Zika in Texas can only be done through the Centers for Disease Control. Within weeks, our state lab in Austin is planning to test for the virus.

Mosquito activity is low during our coldest months. Beginning May 1st, the HHSD mosquito management program begins its work collecting, testing, and treating mosquito breeding areas throughout Austin and Travis County.

Based on what we know now, Zika virus is transmitted to persons primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito (*Aedes* species). Dallas County just received confirmation of a patient who developed Zika virus after sexual contact with an infected traveler. This is the only case of locally transmitted Zika virus infection that has been identified in the continental United States at this time. Our understanding is that the CDC will issue guidance in the coming days on prevention of sexual transmission of Zika.

HHSD continues to encourage people to follow travel precautions and avoid mosquito bites. The illness is typically mild and resolves within one week. However, as noted previously, Zika infection in pregnant women may be associated with congenital microcephaly and fetal loss. Guillain-Barre syndrome has also been reported in patients after suspected Zika infection.

Preventative measures residents can take to avoid mosquito bites include draining any water around their property, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and using EPA-registered insect repellents.

HHSD will continue to work with area health care providers, inform and educate the public through our website and social media vehicles, participate in media interviews and confer with our state, federal and local partners on next steps.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/article/zika-virus>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact my office at 972-5010.

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager