

ZIKA: *the Collective Response*



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CARPHA's Response

The Caribbean Public Health Agency together with CARPHA Member States (CMS), and regional and international partners have taken active steps to prepare the region's response to the Zika outbreak.

CARPHA advocates for regional preparedness using a partnership approach that provides a coordinated, measured and proportionate response, and recognises that the region should help in the fight against mosquito borne diseases and other public health threats.

In response to the threat of Zika, CARPHA activated its incident management team and issued an alert to Member States. The IMT coordinates regional response and supports national preparedness and response to threats such as Zika.

At the start of 2016, CARPHA convened a regional media conference "Zero in on Zika" to discuss issues related to the virus. During this conference senior technical officers engaged the media on facts about the disease, the impacts on tourism and health, and surveillance and ethical issues.

Testing capacity at CARPHA reference laboratory was enhanced to accommodate the increased influx of samples received from Member States. Nonetheless, the heightened surge in specimens received during the middle of 2016, specifically from pregnant women suspected with ZIKV, temporarily overwhelmed capacity.

Reporting capacity was improved and reports disseminated to regional and international partners, such as Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC). A policy paper was presented to the Inter Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of CARICOM in February 2016, outlining the health and economic threat of ZIKV, and the need for multi-sector action.

Periodic ZIKV updates were circulated to stakeholders and uploaded to a dedicated webpage. These updates detailed **preventive measures, advice for pregnant women**, associated complications and **general background information**. Documents related to **ZIKV and tourism**, the regional perspective of ZIKV and the **iceberg effect** as it relates to ZIKV were also made available. Case definitions were also disseminated to Chief Medical Officers, National Epidemiologists and Laboratory Managers of CMS. These definitions were updated as disease transmission progressed.

Through the Caribbean Travel and Health Network (CaTHNET) forum, there was rapid dissemination of information to agencies such as Public Health England (PHE), Public Health Agency Canada (PHAC) and CDC. CaTHNET is an information sharing network of public health agencies designed for timely and efficient sharing of outbreak information. This network aims to promote global health security by providing information on issues of public health concern to travellers visiting the Caribbean region.

CARPHA also launched the Caribbean Mosquito Awareness Week, May 7-11, 2016, in collaboration with CARICOM and PAHO/WHO. Under the theme, "Small Bites, Big Threats" key messages were conveyed on steps for avoiding mosquito bites, eliminating mosquito breeding sites, and protecting pregnant women from ZIKV. The initiative included the development of a website <http://caribbeanmosquitoweek.carpha.org/>, where various information could be accessed including; mosquito control and prevention material, key contact information and listings of associated activities in CMS.

Member States

All CMS responded to the outbreak by intensifying vector control measures, expanding public education and increasing public health surveillance. Some MS developed country specific plans using the framework of the Integrated Management Strategies for Dengue (IMS-Dengue) and re-activated their IMS-Dengue committees which were active during the chikungunya outbreaks of 2014/2015. Additionally, Ministries of Health in MS have collaborated with regional academic institutions such as the University of the West Indies, Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine, St. George's University and the Windward Islands Research and Education Foundation, to conduct research on arboviral diseases.

Collaborative Partners' Responses

The hotel and tourism industry held joint webinars with. The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) along with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) in collaboration with CARPHA, circulated guidelines for ZIKV prevention and control for the tourist population. Joint webinars were held with hotels, cruise ships and various Ministries of Health to increase awareness of surveillance guidelines and joint public health action. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) held training sessions on ZIKV management for countries in the region. The World Health Organization (WHO) provided funding for two (2) regional workshops to develop a regional network on surveillance and diagnosis of emerging vector-borne diseases in the Caribbean through TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases. These two workshops were held in December, 2015 and May, 2016.

CDC provided funding for a CDC Zika project to be executed by CARPHA. Through this project, capacity is being built in CMS for entomological surveillance, vector control programmes are being strengthened and the Caribbean Vector Borne Disease Network (CariVecNet) is being developed.

The Public Health Agency Canada (PHAC) provided funds to CARPHA for strengthening capacity for laboratory diagnosis of ZIKV. The DFID through PAHO also provided funds to CARPHA for strengthening laboratory capacity for both ZIKV diagnosis and insecticide resistance testing in a few MS.

The European Union African, Caribbean and Pacific Forum of countries (EU/ACP) has approved funds for a 4-year project to support the detection, surveillance, prevention and control of ZIKV in the Caribbean, under the 11th European Development Intra-ACP Fund.