

February 2, 2016

CARPHA stresses the need for a coordinated regional response to Zika

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. February 2, 2016. On February 1st, 2016, Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), declared that clusters of microcephaly and other neurological disorders potentially linked to the spread of the Zika virus (ZIKV) represents a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The need for the Caribbean region to continue its ongoing and coordinated response to the threat of Zika virus (ZIKV) and any potentially associated risk has been reinforced by this, the fourth-ever such declaration.

The increased level of attention created by this Declaration has the potential for further impact on the travel and tourism industry, particularly as most Caribbean economies are so highly dependent on tourism. The risk of regional spread of the disease is also real because the *Aedes aegypti* vector is prevalent throughout the Region. This means that it is of critical importance that, as a Region, we take strong measures to eliminate mosquito breeding and avoid being bitten, and that is particularly so for persons at risk of complications of Zika, such as pregnant women and all should work to those ends to minimise human and economic damage.

To date, Zika has been confirmed in five territories of the Caribbean Community. A number of other Caribbean jurisdictions have also reported Zika transmission. The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), has supported its member states by enhancing regional surveillance and the Agency's capacity for ZIKV testing, by monitoring regional and global developments, partnering with regional and international stakeholders, and providing updates for Ministries of Health and other key stakeholders.

The importance of a coordinated, sustained, all of society response at regional and national level has been stressed, which includes health, education, travel and tourism, media, local government and other sectors including private enterprise and householders.

Some essentials include:

- A well-coordinated, continuous public education campaign on how to stop mosquitos breeding and biting.
- Balancing informing the public and avoiding unnecessary anxiety and panic.
- Mobilisation of resources for strengthening of vector control capacity in countries.

CARPHA has prepared a policy brief for the Intersessional Meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government on February 16 -17 in Belize, which will give policy recommendations for strengthening national and regional action in the face of this threat, building on their 17th Special Session in November 2014 on public health threats.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization, CARPHA will soon launch a Caribbean Mosquito Control Awareness Week, which has been agreed with the Council of Health Ministers.

CARPHA continues to urge persons to adopt protective measures to control mosquito populations and the prevention of mosquito bites in at-risk individuals, especially pregnant women. CARPHA has developed [Zika Guidelines for Travellers](#), [Zika Guidelines for Hotels and Guesthouses](#). The agency has also produced [FAQs on ZIKV](#).

*Since the International Health Regulations (2005) came into force, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared PHEICs for H1N1 2009, Polio 2014, Ebola 2014 and *recent cluster of microcephaly cases and other neurological disorders* 2016.



Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA)

Communications Unit

16-18 Jamaica Boulevard, Federation Park

Port of Spain

Trinidad and Tobago

Tel: (868) 622 4261/299-0895

Fax: (868) 622 2792

www.carpha.org