

# ZIKA: HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Communicating Zika virus preventive behaviors, transmission paths, and the underlying science are challenging. There are many scientific unknowns, an uncertainty of the risk, and tragic consequences for pregnant women and their fetuses. Clear, consistent, and frequent communication from trusted sources and channels makes it easier for people to understand Zika information which can help them to make decisions. Effective communication can support attitudes, norms, and behaviors to prevent the spread of Zika and protect pregnant woman.

## Resources to help state and local jurisdictions make their own Zika Action Plans

- CDC's key messages
- Communication products: fact sheets, infographics, videos, media templates, and CDC's Digital Press Kit
- Clinical resources for health care partners, such as CDC guidance, Health Alert Network messages, MMWRs, and Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA) deliverables
- CDC's web site and microsite, which brings content to *your* web site and updates it automatically
- Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications (CERC) information and examples

## State and local jurisdictions should consider the following communication activities when making their own Zika Action Plans

- ✓ Prepare a communication campaign for general awareness and targeted health behaviors. A campaign can provide messages about personal protection and reducing mosquitos around the home. High priority audiences should include pregnant women, travelers, and healthcare providers to raise awareness of Zika virus. Include messaging on the risk for sexual transmission, and steps people can take to prevent it.
- ✓ A campaign can include activities for different audiences and channels.
  - Disseminate messages to encourage travelers returning from areas with Zika to take precautions upon return (e.g., actively take steps to prevent mosquito bites for at least 3 weeks) to reduce the risk of spread to local mosquito populations.
  - Intensify county-wide or jurisdiction-wide outreach (newspaper, radio, social media, call centers).
  - As appropriate, issue press releases/media statements and intensify visible activities in the jurisdiction to increase attention to Zika virus transmission risk and personal protection measures.
  - Monitor local news stories and social media to determine if information is accurate, identify messaging gaps, and make adjustments to communication strategies as needed.
  - Update scripts for call centers to include Zika messaging.

## Five Key Communication Messages for Zika

- Zika infection during pregnancy is linked to birth defects. Pregnant women should not travel to areas with active Zika virus transmission.
- Zika is primarily spread through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito.
- The best way to prevent Zika is to prevent mosquito bites.
- Most people infected with Zika don't even know they have it. People usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika.
- See a healthcare provider if you develop a fever, rash, joint pain, or reddish eyes during a trip or within 2 weeks after traveling to a place with Zika, or if you are pregnant and have had sexual contact with someone who has traveled.

## Goals for Zika Communication Activities

- **Increase awareness** about how to properly follow **steps to** prevent mosquito bites.
- **Educate pregnant women** about how to prevent Zika and what to do if they think they have Zika.
- **Educate women of reproductive age** so they are informed about the risk Zika virus presents to them if they become pregnant.
- **Maintain credibility and public trust** by regularly providing timely, accurate, accessible, consistent, and comprehensive information about what is known and what is unknown.
- **Avoid speculation and conjecture.** Dispel rumors, misinformation, and misperceptions as quickly as possible. Address concerns and fears of pregnant women and their families.
- **Identify, train, and use the most credible spokespersons.** For example, use doctors and scientists for health messages, use public officials for policy decisions).
- **Apply emergency risk communication principles** to all public messaging. Use plain and clear language.
- **Coordinate communication** with partners across all levels of local, state and federal government as well as with healthcare and industry partners.

## Channels for Communicating About Zika

**Use multiple communication channels** (radio, print newspaper, television, social media, flyers, billboards, town hall meetings, door-to-door messaging) to clearly communicate key messages about risk, prevention, diagnosis, and Zika virus disease management to populations at-risk, including the geographic areas of risk.

### Internet

- Update state response websites frequently with Zika information for all audiences.
- Consider embedding CDC's Zika virus website into your website by using CDC's microsite: <https://tools.cdc.gov/medialibrary/index.aspx#/microsite/id/234558>.
- Use accurate public health images from CDC's Public Health Image Library: <http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp>.

### Social Media

- Use Facebook and Twitter to create more personalized communication at the state and local level.

### Media Outreach

- Provide regular, proactive media updates that address the spread of Zika virus.
- Develop and provide programming or public service announcements on prevention.

### Community Outreach

- Meet with community leaders and representatives of specific groups to understand communication needs and challenges and to modify behavior change messaging.
- Conduct public forums and community meetings to answer questions and provide guidance during local transmission.

### Clinician Outreach

- Encourage clinicians to join [CDC's Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity](#), [Health Alert Network](#), and [Epi-X](#).
- Disseminate Zika clinical guidance and MMWR reports to clinicians through emails, web updates, and webinars.
- Disseminate information on laboratory testing and Zika surveillance to all healthcare providers.

### Advertising

- Monitor information needs and adapt billboard, radio, and point-of-contact advertising (e.g., posters in gathering places) to keep messages up to date.

### Reports

- Provide brief but regular reports to primary audiences that document actions and progress since the last report.