

CITY OF BALTIMORE

STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE, Mayor



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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March 18, 2016

Dear College or University Health Services:

As Spring Break approaches, the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) would like to inform clinicians of higher education campuses about the ongoing outbreaks of Zika virus in countries in the Caribbean, and Central and South Americas, as some of your students may be traveling to or returning from these affected countries.

Zika virus is spread to humans through direct bite from infected *Aedes* species mosquitoes, and sexual activity (i.e. vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, or fellatio) from an infected man to a woman. Approximately 20% of people who are infected with the Zika virus will become symptomatic. Clinical symptoms of Zika infection include fever, maculopapular (often itchy) rash, myalgias, conjunctivitis, joint pain, and headaches. Symptoms are usually mild and last for a few days to a week. Treatment is supportive, and clinicians should also consider other infectious diseases including dengue, malaria, chikungunya and other diseases with a similar clinical presentation. The most significant concern about Zika virus is the strong association with prenatal exposure, microcephaly and other detrimental congenital defects. We recommend that pregnant women postpone travel to countries with ongoing Zika infections. For anyone who is traveling, should take steps to prevent mosquito bites:

(<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention/index.html>).

As of today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports over 250 travel-acquired Zika virus cases: 18 are in pregnant women, 6 were sexually transmitted, and zero locally acquired vector-borne cases in the continental United States. We want to highlight current knowledge about Zika virus disease transmission, prevention, and testing to assist you with counseling your patients.

Because of the significant risk, we are asking clinicians to take the following 3 steps:

1) Screen Travel History – Ascertain patients for any travel to countries with ongoing Zika transmission. For up to date information about high-risk areas, go to the CDC website: (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html>).

2) Make recommendations for pregnant women and for men with pregnant partners - We recommend pregnant women to postpone travel. Men who are considering travelling to areas with active Zika virus transmission, who have sexual partners who are pregnant or women of reproductive age, should use prevention measures to limit mosquito bites. Men who traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission who have a pregnant partner should abstain from sexual activity (i.e., vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, or fellatio) or use condoms for the duration of the pregnancy. Pregnant women should discuss their male partner's potential exposures to mosquitoes and history of Zika-like illness with their provider.

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3) Report patients with travel history who are pregnant or symptomatic for Zika testing to the BCHD Office of Acute Communicable Diseases at 410-396-4436 during normal hours, and 410-396-3100 after business hours. We will discuss the case with you and determine if testing is necessary.

We are working closely with State and federal officials. We recommend that you **regularly check the CDC Zika Virus website (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>) for the most recent updates.** We will also have updates on the BCHD website (<http://health.baltimorecity.gov/zika-virus>).

Thank you for your excellent care of patients and for your service.

Sincerely,



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Commissioner
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