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State Strengthens Response Efforts to Fight the Bite as Summer Draws Near
State Laboratory Zika testing now available, avoid traveling to affected areas

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 26, 2016) – With the Memorial Day holiday signaling the start of summer and vacation season for Kentuckians, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) has strengthened its response efforts to Fight the Bite against Zika virus to include the ability to now test for Zika virus at its public health laboratory in Frankfort, in addition to urging people to follow mosquito precautions and avoid traveling to Zika-affected areas.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized emergency use of two laboratory tests developed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on individuals meeting CDC Zika virus clinical criteria. These two tests, a Zika IgM antibody capture enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (MAC-ELISA) and a triplex real-time PCR (RT-PCR) assay, can only be performed by qualified laboratories designated by CDC. The Kentucky Department for Public Health, Division of Laboratory Services (DLS), has performed this testing since May 2. Due to the recent emergence of data that demonstrates persistence of viral nucleic acid in urine, DLS will now accept urine specimens alongside patient-matched serum specimens for RT-PCR testing within 14 days of symptom onset. Requests for Zika testing should be coordinated with an individual's healthcare provider in collaboration with the Kentucky Department for Public Health.

DPH officials continue to urge Kentuckians, particularly pregnant women and women planning to become pregnant, to avoid traveling to areas of the world with active Zika transmission.

"We strongly advise that anyone - especially pregnant women - planning to travel to countries where Zika virus is circulating take steps to protect themselves. This includes being knowledgeable about where the virus is spreading, consulting with a healthcare provider, and following public health recommendations to avoid mosquito bites," said Dr. Ardis Hoven, infectious disease specialist for DPH.

The CDC recommends that pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant take the following precautions:

- Pregnant women should not travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women should not travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other healthcare professional first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.



- Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their healthcare professional before traveling to Zika-affected areas and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.
- Based on reports of possible Zika transmission through sexual contact, CDC recommends pregnant women avoid sexual contact with men who have recently returned from areas with Zika transmission. CDC recommends men who have traveled to a Zika-affected area and developed symptoms consistent with Zika during travel or two weeks after travel to use condoms for six months after symptoms begin or to abstain from sex for 6 months. CDC recommends men who have traveled to a Zika-affected area and did not develop any symptoms to use condoms for at least 8 weeks after departure from Zika-affected areas or abstain from sex for 8 weeks.
- Recent evidence reveals that Zika virus can cause microcephaly and other fetal birth defects in infants born to women who are infected during pregnancy. Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is smaller than normal. Microcephaly can be found alone or in conjunction with other birth defects.

International travelers to areas with active Zika transmission who develop fever, rash, joint pain or conjunctivitis within two weeks of return to Kentucky should consult with their medical provider.

A full list of affected countries/regions can be found online, <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>. Kentuckians planning international travel are particularly recommended to consult the CDC's Travelers' Health Website, <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>, for country-specific health information for travelers. A Weblink about Zika Travel Information, <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information>, is found on that site. Zika has been identified by the World Health Organization as an international public health threat. There are no known cases of Zika transmission occurring in the state of Kentucky – or any part of the United States – at this time. Zika virus is not known to be circulating in the mosquito population in Kentucky at this time.

State officials remind residents to follow the 3 D's for mosquito bite prevention: Dress – Wear light colored long sleeve shirts and long pants; Drain – Eliminate all standing water where mosquitoes breed such as bird baths, tires, buckets and gutters; and Defend – Use an EPA-approved insect repellent at all times for outdoor activities.

To date, 6 confirmed cases of Zika virus have been reported in Kentuckians who contracted the illness while traveling to other countries.

For further information visit the DPH website <http://healthalerts.ky.gov/zika> or the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/zika. Be sure to follow KYHealthAlerts on Twitter and DPH's Zika mascot, Marty Mosquito, on Instagram, @marty mosquito.

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.