



**CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

Matthew G. Bevin
Governor

Division of Communications
275 E. Main Street, 5C-A
Frankfort, KY 40621
(502) 564-6786
Fax: (502) 564-0274
www.chfs.ky.gov

Vickie Yates Brown Glisson
Secretary

Statewide News Release

Media Contact: Barbara Fox (502) 564-6786 x3102
or **Beth Fisher** (502) 564-6786 x3101

Public Health Officials Caution Pregnant Women to Avoid Traveling to Zika-Affected Areas

Pregnant Women, Those Planning to Become Pregnant Should Remain Cautious

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 19, 2016) — The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) is warning Kentuckians, particularly pregnant women and women planning to become pregnant, to avoid traveling to areas of the world with active Zika virus transmission.

The virus is primarily spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. “We strongly warn everyone – especially pregnant women or women planning to become pregnant – avoid traveling to countries where Zika virus is circulating. “With Kentuckians competing in and attending the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil this summer, we must remain vigilant and take steps to protect ourselves. 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. Hiram Polk, DPH commissioner.

For a full list of affected countries and regions visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html>.

“If you are unsure about the presence of Zika in the area in which you are traveling, err on the side of caution. Use repellent and wear protective clothing to avoid mosquito bites,” Dr. Polk said. “Furthermore, travelers should continue these practices for three weeks upon returning home to avoid spreading Zika locally.”

Kentuckians planning international travel are particularly encouraged 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. International travelers to at-risk countries who develop fever, rash, joint pain, red inflamed eyes and other acute symptoms within two weeks of return to Kentucky should consult with their medical provider.

Increasing scientific evidence suggests a link between infection in pregnant women and infants born with birth defects such as microcephaly. Microcephaly is a condition where the head is smaller than normal and is very likely to be associated with significant central nervous system abnormalities and life-long complications.

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent infection and no specific antiviral treatment for Zika infection. Its most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes, although many infected individuals have no symptoms at all.

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 occurring.**

Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas must talk to their doctor or other healthcare professional first 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.

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.

There are no known cases of Zika transmission occurring in the state of Kentucky – or any part of the United States – at this time, but has occurred among nine travelers. Zika virus is not known to be circulating in the mosquito population in Kentucky at this time.

For further information visit the DPH website <http://healthalerts.ky.gov/zika> or the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/zika. Zika virus awareness and prevention Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are available at <http://healthalerts.ky.gov/Pages/Zika.aspx>

Be sure to follow KYHealthAlerts on Twitter and DPH's Zika mascot, Marty Mosquito, on Instagram, @martymosquito.

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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.