

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (75) in DH SEB CD/8/97/1 Pt.4

11 March 2016

Dear Principal/Person-in-charge,

**The Government Activates the Alert Response Level of the
Preparedness and Response Plan for Zika Virus Infection**

I write to inform you that today the Government has launched the *Preparedness and Response Plan for Zika Virus Infection* (the Plan). The Plan aims to provide a framework of response system for agreed and coordinated efforts among relevant government departments and organisations with a view to reducing the public health impact on Hong Kong population due to Zika virus infection (ZVI). It adopts a three-tier response level system, including Alert, Serious and Emergency, with each level representing a graded risk of Zika virus affecting Hong Kong and its health impact on the community. It defines corresponding command structures and public health response measures, and serves as a tool for clear communication of the level of risk to the public. According to the risk assessment of the latest situation of ZVI, the “Alert” response level has been activated today.

Currently there are human cases occurring in countries/areas with possibilities of significant travel and trade with Hong Kong, while the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that Zika constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and is maintaining a global alert. We will closely monitor the global and regional situation as well as experts' views, and will assess the risk from time to time in view of the latest scientific evidence and situation, activate or deactivate the response level and implement corresponding measures.



ZVI is a mosquito-borne disease caused by Zika virus. It is primarily transmitted to humans through bites from *Aedes* mosquitoes. Symptoms typically begin 2-7 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Most ZVI is asymptomatic. The most common symptoms of ZVI are fever and skin rash,

usually accompanied by conjunctivitis, muscle or joint pain and general malaise. These symptoms are usually mild and last for a few days. There is no specific medication for the disease and symptomatic treatment is given to relief discomfort. The current major concern is the possible association with adverse pregnancy outcome (microcephaly) and neurological and autoimmune complications such as Guillain-Barré syndrome.

According to WHO, an increasing number of countries and territories have reported cases of ZVI. As of 10 March 2016, a total of 52 countries and territories have reported autochthonous (local) transmission or indication of transmission of Zika virus since 2007 and three with locally acquired infections probably through sexual contact in the absence of any known mosquito vectors. Moreover, 12 imported cases of ZVI have been confirmed in Mainland China so far.

Due to extensive international travel, Hong Kong has a high risk of importation of cases of ZVI. As asymptomatic infection is very common and the potential vector, *Aedes albopictus*, is present locally, there is also risk of local spread if Zika is introduced to Hong Kong. Schools and institutions are crowded places where we have much concern with the risk of ZVI. To prevent the disease, please be reminded to take the following preventive measures to protect from mosquito bites and help prevent mosquito proliferation.

1. To prevent mosquito-borne diseases, wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers, and use DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed parts of the body and clothing. Take additional preventive measures when engaging in outdoor activities:

- Avoid using fragrant cosmetics or skin care products;
- Re-apply insect repellents according to instructions.

2. Special notes when travelling abroad:

- If going to areas with ongoing Zika virus transmission (affected areas) (http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/43209.html), travellers, especially persons with immune disorders or severe chronic illnesses, should arrange a consultation with doctor at least 6 weeks before the trip, and have extra preventive measures to avoid mosquito bites;

- During the trip, if travelling in rural affected areas, carry a portable bed net and apply permethrin (an insecticide) on it. Permethrin should NOT be applied to skin. Seek medical attention promptly if feeling unwell;
- Travellers who return from affected areas should apply insect repellent for 14 days after arrival to Hong Kong. If feeling unwell e.g. having fever, should seek medical advice promptly, and provide travel details to doctor.

3. Special notes for pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy:

- Pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy should consider deferring their trip to affected areas. Those who must travel to any of these areas should seek medical advice from their doctor before the trip, adopt contraception if appropriate, strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip, and consult and reveal their travel history to their doctor if symptoms develop after the trip. Women preparing for pregnancy are advised to continue to adopt contraception for 28 days after returning from these areas.

4. Special notes for prevention of sexual transmission regarding potential adverse pregnancy outcome*:

- Pregnant lady should not have sex with her male partner who had travelled to affected areas, or else condom should be used.
- Any male traveller returning from affected areas should:
 - abstain from sex with his pregnant partner, or else use condoms throughout the pregnancy;
 - use condoms for at least six months if his female partner may get pregnant.

**This is a precaution and may be revised as more information becomes available. Individuals with further concerns regarding potential sexual transmission of Zika virus should contact their doctor for advice.*

5. Help prevent mosquito proliferation by preventing accumulation of stagnant water and controlling vectors and reservoir of the diseases:

- Change the water in vases once a week;
- Clear the water in the saucers under potted plants every week;
- Cover water containers tightly;
- Ensure air-conditioner drip trays are free of stagnant water;
- Put all used cans and bottles into covered dustbins;

- Store food and dispose of garbage properly.

You may wish to note that pregnant women and children of 6 months or older can use DEET-containing insect repellent. For details about the use of insect repellents and the key points to be observed, please refer to 'Tips for using insect repellents' at http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/38927.html. For latest information and health advice, please refer to the Centre for Health Protection's dedicated mini web http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/43086.html.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'SK CHUANG', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

(Dr. SK CHUANG)

for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health