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## Texas Department of State Health Services

May 4, 2017

County Judges and Mayors:

Thank you for your continued efforts to safeguard your communities against Zika virus. Your role as county judges and mayors places you at the forefront of emergency response. We know you are committed to protecting your community, and we are asking for your help carrying out certain critical functions in your jurisdiction. With the ongoing risk posed by Zika, we are requesting your continued assistance in delaying locally transmitted Zika virus in Texas this year by promoting precautions to prevent mosquito bites and taking action to reduce mosquito breeding grounds in your communities.

Due to the Zika virus' ability to cause birth defects, the public health measures we take together will help prevent serious health impacts on the next generation of Texans. We expect local mosquito transmission of Zika to resume and persist as the weather warms and mosquito activity increases. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) stands ready to provide technical expertise as you prepare your locality's Zika response plans or prepare to conduct community engagement efforts. Further, we ask that you please lead the organization of certain activities for your local community:

- coordinate community clean-up of areas known for having items or areas that collect water and allow mosquitos to breed around human habitation;
- host or ask volunteers to host community events for stakeholders to answer Zika questions, conduct clean-up demonstrations and provide educational materials;
- coordinate neighborhood outreach about precautions individuals can take to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites; and
- initiate or enhance monitoring and surveillance of mosquito activity and accelerate mosquito abatement efforts, including use of larvicide.

County Judges and Mayors

May 4, 2017

Page 2

DSHS continues to coordinate with local health departments across the state to plan for and respond to Zika. In addition to those coordination efforts, we request your assistance and leadership in promoting important messages to prevent or delay local mosquito transmission of Zika and protect Texans.

**Individuals should protect themselves from mosquitoes at home, work and during outdoor recreation or traveling:**

- Precautions include consistently using mosquito repellent when outside, wearing long sleeves and pants and using air conditioning or making sure window screens will keep mosquitoes out of the home and other indoor environments.
- Pregnant women should follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's advice to avoid traveling to locations with sustained local Zika transmission, including all areas of Mexico.
- Pregnant women and their sexual partners who have traveled to those areas should use condoms or avoid sexual contact during the course of the pregnancy.

**Texans statewide should pick up trash and dump out containers that could hold standing water in and around their homes, schools, outdoor recreation venues and businesses to deny mosquitoes a place to lay their eggs.**

DSHS' website dedicated to Zika, [www.TexasZika.org](http://www.TexasZika.org), has a variety of information and materials available in English and Spanish, such as a Zika communications toolkit for organizations interested in sharing important information with their constituents, including pregnant women, travelers and individuals who work outdoors. Please feel free to send any questions to [TexasZika@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:TexasZika@dshs.texas.gov). The attached document lists measures communities and individuals can take to protect themselves against mosquito bites and Zika virus.


We encourage all communities to take action now to address the threat of Zika virus in Texas. Together, we can reduce the impact of Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases. We must prepare and begin our efforts before weather conditions allow mosquitoes to proliferate. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us as we work to limit locally transmitted cases of Zika in Texas.

Thank you for your assistance in this important public health matter.

Sincerely,



Greg Abbott  
Governor



John Hellerstedt, M.D.  
Commissioner, DSHS

## **Zika Virus Protection and Prevention**

### **Measures to Protect Communities from Zika Virus**

- conduct neighborhood outreach about active precautions individuals can take to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites;
- initiate or enhance monitoring and surveillance of mosquito activity;
- develop a local contingency plan for mosquito abatement and surveillance, and plan for additional control measures if needed;
- keep public drains and ditches clear of weeds and trash so water will not collect;
- implement efforts to clean up illegal dump sites and collect heavy trash; and
- encourage people to report illegal dumpsites and standing water, and respond quickly to these complaints.

### **Measures for Individuals to Protect Themselves from Mosquito Bites**

- wear insect repellent,
- cover up with long-sleeved shirts and long pants,
- keep mosquitoes out with air conditioning or intact window screens, and
- limit outdoor activities during peak mosquito times.

### **Measures for Individuals to Prevent Mosquito Breeding**

- At least weekly, carefully check the area around your home, school or workplace for mosquito breeding areas:
  - clear and empty gutters;
  - empty or get rid of cans, buckets, old tires, pots, plant saucers and other containers that hold water;
  - remove standing water around structures and from flat roofs;
  - change water in pet dishes daily;
  - rinse and scrub vases and other indoor water containers weekly;
  - change water in wading pools and bird baths several times a week;
  - maintain backyard pools or hot tubs;
  - cover trash containers;
  - water lawns and gardens carefully so water does not stand for several days;
  - screen rain barrels and openings to water tanks or cisterns; and
  - treat front and back door areas of homes with residual insecticides if mosquitoes are abundant nearby.
- If mosquito problems persist, consider pesticide applications for vegetation around the home.

### **TexasZika.org Communications Resources**

- Zika Communications Toolkit:  
<http://www.texaszika.org/docs/TexasDSHSZikaCommunicationsToolkitII.pdf>

County Judges and Mayors

May 4, 2017

Page 4

- Sharable graphics for social media: <http://www.texaszika.org/materials.htm#toolkit>
- Fact sheets and posters: <http://texaszika.org/materials.htm>