

Zika Update

New Jersey continues to be ready to address Zika

By Cathleen Bennett, Commissioner, NJ Department of Health; and Bob Martin, Commissioner, NJ Department of Environmental Protection

With the summer season transitioned to fall, we are reminding the public that New Jersey has been aggressively responding to the potential threat of the Zika virus since early this year. This remains a priority as we learn more about Zika and continue to collaborate with our partners in a unified effort to protect the public from mosquito-borne illnesses.

The New Jersey Department of Health and the Department of Environmental Protection have worked closely with public health and county mosquito control partners to educate the public, monitor and reduce the mosquito population, and prepare for this virus.

New Jersey has decades of experience tracking and preventing mosquito-borne illnesses that pose a threat to human health and domestic animals, namely West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. These more common threats will remain with us until the first frosts of fall.

Preventative Efforts

It is important to note that so far New Jersey has seen no local transmission of Zika, although more than 130 individuals who traveled to countries where Zika is active have tested positive for the virus.

The risk of local transmission here remains low, but it's important to know what the State has done in response to this threat. Together, we have invested more than \$5 million to carry out a variety of activities. These include testing 1,300 individuals for the virus, creating the #ZapZika public awareness campaign, distributing Zika prevention kits for pregnant women, establishing a 24/7 Zika hotline (800-962-1253), and providing additional resources to county mosquito control commissions to increase mosquito surveillance and reduce the mosquito population. DOH has also been monitoring babies born to mothers who may have been exposed during pregnancy to connect them to services.

Thousands of healthcare providers, local public health, EMS and emergency preparedness professionals, and staff in WIC clinics and hospitals get regular updates via trainings, webinars, and conference calls led by the Department of Health. Both departments partnered with the New Jersey Association of County and City Health Officials in June to host a Zika workshop with local health and mosquito control agencies to share lessons learned and discuss how to further educate communities.



Health Commissioner Cathleen Bennett (standing) stopped by the state warehouse in Trenton this fall where volunteers assembled Zika prevention kits for pregnant women who may be traveling to areas where Zika transmission is ongoing or who have a partner who has recently traveled to an impacted area. The kits include insect repellent, permethrin spray, condoms, educational materials, and mosquito net.

More than 30 public events have taken place to educate pregnant women and potential travelers to the nearly 60 countries currently impacted by Zika.

Mosquito Control

DEP has awarded an additional \$500,000 in grants to county mosquito control for reimbursements for expenses incurred for mosquito control, monitoring and identification efforts, as well as supplies and additional staffing.

DEP has also provided county mosquito control commissions with specialized traps for collecting Aedes mosquitoes and mosquito dunks (ecologically safe tablets placed in standing water to destroy mosquito larvae before they hatch into adult mosquitoes). To date, more than 7,000 mosquitoes have tested negative for the virus. But should a mosquito carrying the disease be identified, the State Mosquito Control Commission, county mosquito control, and DEP are ready to deploy a comprehensive, rapid response to immediately attack the threat.

In addition, DEP has raised and stocked more than 460,000 fish that eat mosquito larvae and will continue stocking suitable larval habitats through the fall. The Department also established a regional distribution center in Camden County to increase capacity so southern counties can have quick and convenient access to these mosquito-eating predators.

The Department of Health's #ZapZika campaign features radio ads, bus ads, and social media efforts. Education materials are available from both Departments' websites. A DEP podcast features leaders from both agencies talking about Zika response efforts at njdep.podbean.com

Citizen Action Required

But for everything we do at the state level, it remains critically important that residents take steps to reduce mosquito breeding around their properties by removing any sources of standing water. Mosquitoes can breed in standing water in a container as small as a bottle cap—remember, standing water plus seven days equals mosquitoes.

Clean out gutters, change water in bird baths, make sure trash cans are tightly sealed, and dispose of old flower pots. If venturing outdoors, wear protective clothing and use EPA-registered mosquito repellents.

Working together, we can ensure that we are not only protected from Zika, but from other mosquito-borne diseases that we have been combatting for years. 🦟