

Remarks by the Minister of Health Hon. Dr. Christopher Tufton Zika Virus Press Briefing March 18, 2016

Introduction

I want to thank the media for the continued support. Going forward we will have to strengthen our partnership to ensure that our messages to empower Jamaicans to secure their health has as wide a reach as possible. I want to point out that this fight against zika will take a united effort from every individual and every sector in the country. Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, we now have three (3) new positive confirmed cases of the zika virus in Jamaica bringing the total to four (4).

Confirmed cases of Zika virus

The first positive case of zika virus in Jamaica was identified in Greater Portmore St. Catherine on January 29, 2016. As I said we now have three additional cases about which we became aware yesterday evening. Two of these cases were confirmed by tests carried out at the University of the West Indies Virology lab. As you know we just increased the capacity of that lab to test for zika with a \$10 million injection from the CHASE Fund. These are among the first sets of results that we have gotten from the thirty (30) zika samples that were sent for testing since it started last week. The other case was from a sample which was sent to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA).

Two of these cases were detected in Greater Portmore and Christian Meadows in St. Catherine and one in Lyssons, St. Thomas.

Public Health Response

We will be deploying additional resources to both communities including vector control workers, equipment and supplies as well as other resources to enhance surveillance and public awareness. Similar to the activities carried out when the first case was identified, which led to the Public Health team visiting approximately 4,000 homes in the area, the team is currently conducting fever surveillance and contact investigation in the affected communities. We have also commenced a fogging blitz in the affected communities. This means that fogging will take place in the communities for three consecutive nights per week for three weeks to eradicate adult *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes which spread the zika, dengue and chikungunya viruses.

The Ministry's National Emergency Operations Centre will continue to coordinate the response. The island-wide enhanced surveillance system is in place to monitor all fever and rash cases, neurological syndromes and congenital malformations and any other presentations consistent with Zika.

The Ministry of Health continues to actively investigate to detect any other cases that might be present in the areas or in the country.

Ongoing activities

We had been ramping up our vector control activities especially in communities with high levels of mosquito breeding and will continue to do so. Our teams will continue the work in the field around communities to guide householders in terms of identifying and destroying mosquito breeding sites and keeping their surroundings clean.

Operation: Mosquito Search and Destroy

In recognition of the importance of community involvement, we have been pushing the Operation: Mosquito Search and Destroy initiative under which we are coordinating community cleanup campaigns along with our partners. Although our focus is on communities with high levels of mosquito breeding we urge everyone in all communities across the island to embrace this initiative and plan your own special cleanup days.

We had the first in February in St. Catherine, we moved to St. Ann in March and in April we are planning to lead activities in Manchester.

Public Education

We have ramped up our public education and are partnering with the media to spread our messages. We have several messages currently running in the print and electronic media as part of our media campaign. We have engaged persons to become "health ambassadors" to spread prevention messages with special emphasis on the zika virus.

We also have messages on JUTC buses and their internal panels, Billboards, electronic Boards in over 20 locations, our social media updates remain very active and we have included all of our material on our website. The Gleaner has been partnering with us to provide weekly information on zika and the Sunday Observer to allow us space for a weekly article.

We have distributed thousands of education material to all schools, workplaces and other entities and individuals across the island. We also continue to provide weekly updates to the media through our press releases.

PAHO Mission

This past week we hosted a Mission from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization with experts from the World Health Organization in Geneva Switzerland and a Professor of Neurology from Chile. The team began their assessment of the National Preparedness and Response to the Introduction of Zika Virus into Jamaica. We had a debriefing meeting this morning and the team has:

1. commended the Ministry of Health on a robust Surveillance System
2. validated the newly established testing facility for Zika Virus
3. recommended that through active fever and rash surveillance there be more testing of suspected cases
4. recommended validation of the tested samples using a Regional Reference Lab
5. offered ongoing assistance to support the country's efforts

I am satisfied that adequate preparation has been made for the country's ability to respond to the Zika Virus outbreak and that the response to the positive cases so far has been appropriate.

Individual Responsibility

We are all at risk of zika infection. The mosquito – the *Aedes aegypti* – which spreads the virus lives here with us. This means that we all have to take action not only to reduce breeding but also to protect ourselves from mosquito bites. I want to specially appeal to pregnant women and their partners to be extra vigilant given the links made with zika and complications such as microcephaly. We must all take responsibility for protecting our health

Partnerships

I want to use this opportunity to mention some of our public and private sector partners who have enthusiastically come on board to assist in the fight against the zika virus. We will continue

to collaborate with them. They have really been working with us in this response. We have gotten tremendous support.

They include all Government Ministries, Food for the Poor, the NAJ, JMDA, MAJ, JAPHI, the Umbrella Group of Churches, JIS, Heart Foundation, ODPEM, JDF, NSWMA, PAHO, CDC, TEF, SDC, CHASE and NHF. Also Caribbean Cement Company, NHT, Bank of Nova Scotia Foundation, NCB, NWC, JPS, FLOW, DRT Communication, Red Stripe, NYS, Fontana Pharmacy and JGRA.

The Ministry of Health will continue to update the nation on this matter.

Thank you.



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