



**Texas Department of State
Health Services**



May 24, 2017

School Superintendents and School Board Members:

Thank you for your commitment to the education of the school children of Texas. We know the impact of our schools extends well beyond the walls of their campuses and into the communities they serve. As the school year draws to a close, mosquito season is just beginning. As hubs of your community, we are asking for your help in preventing the spread of Zika by providing your students and their families with additional information.

Zika is primarily spread through mosquito bites (*Aedes aegypti species*). As the weather warms and mosquito activity increases, we expect the threat of local mosquito transmission of Zika to resume and persist. Pregnant women are particularly at risk due to the Zika virus' ability to cause birth defects in unborn infants. We must ensure that their families and their communities are educated on ways they can prevent the spread of Zika. The public health measures we take together will help prevent serious health impacts on the next generation of Texans.

Combatting Zika begins at the local level. When done in concert, these simple steps represent a big step toward preventing the spread of Zika:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent when planning to be outdoors.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and wear long pants when outdoors for prolonged periods.
- Utilize screens or close windows and doors.
- Regularly remove any standing water in and around your home or school that could provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes.
- Cover trash cans or containers that may collect water.
- Visit your doctor if you suspect you've been exposed to Zika or exhibit any of the symptoms of Zika, which may include fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes.

For your convenience, we have enclosed flyers that identify the steps outlined above. Disseminating these flyers to your school children as the school year draws to an end provides an easy method for educating your community and ensuring that, together, we can prevent the spread of Zika.

DSHS' website dedicated to Zika (www.TexasZika.org) has a variety of other free information and materials—in English and Spanish – available for download and order. DSHS has created a Zika communications toolkit for organizations interested in sharing important information with their stakeholders, including employees, school-aged children and their families, and it features newsletter copy, social media content, and more. The website also includes website banners and other shareable graphics; we ask you to please post and share these images on your ISD and school websites and social media platforms.

We encourage all schools and communities to take action now to address the threat of the Zika virus in Texas this summer. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or your local health department as we work together to limit locally-transmitted cases of Zika in Texas and help you prepare school campuses for the summer months. Please feel free to send any questions to TexasZika@dshs.texas.gov.

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

Sincerely,



Greg Abbott
Governor



John Hellerstedt, M.D.
Commissioner, DSHS



Mike Morath
Commissioner, TEA

Zika Virus Protection and Prevention

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.

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.

TexasZika.org Communications Resources

- Zika Communications Toolkit:
<http://www.texaszika.org/docs/TexasDSHSZikaCommunicationsToolkitII.pdf>
- Sharable graphics for social media: <http://www.texaszika.org/materials.htm#toolkit>
- Fact sheets and posters: <http://texaszika.org/materials.htm>