February 9, 2016

Announcement Regarding the Zika Virus and Travel Abroad

The Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Center for Global Health is monitoring events related to the outbreak of the Zika virus in a number of countries in South America, Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean and Puerto Rico. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a level 2 travel alert for people traveling to countries where the Zika virus transmission is ongoing, with particular recommendations for women of reproductive age due to its potential association with birth defects.

The Zika virus is primarily transmitted through mosquitoes, and there is neither a vaccine to prevent it nor medicine to treat it. Anyone traveling to areas with confirmed cases of Zika virus is at risk for infection. Symptoms of Zika virus appear in approximately 1 out of 5 infected people and can include a rash, fever, joint pain and conjunctivitis. The incubation period of the virus is unknown, but thought to be in the range of several days to a week.

For Pregnant Women and Women Trying to Become Pregnant

Out of an abundance of caution, the CDC has issued interim guidance for pregnant women, or those who are planning to become pregnant, who have visited Zika-impacted areas. Although knowledge about Zika virus is evolving, at this time the virus appears to be associated with a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly and other poor pregnancy outcomes in women infected during pregnancy.

The CDC has advised that pregnant women, and women who are considering becoming pregnant, should postpone travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women, and women who are considering becoming pregnant, who must travel to one of these areas should consult with their healthcare provider before traveling and upon return for counseling.

Guidance for MUSC-affiliated travel to Zika-affected regions

MUSC members who are planning international travel are reminded to register international travel plans with International SOS. Registration of travel plans will help facilitate access to emergency assistance and follow-up, if needed, while on university-related international travel.

While no one is obligated to travel to an affected area on University business, those who do are strongly advised to adhere strictly to mosquito precautions:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents.
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents). You can buy pre-treated clothing and gear, or treat them yourself.

For current information, updated travel advisories, and a list of impacted countries, visit the CDC Zika virus website.