

## 9 BEYOND OUR BORDERS

The 'Beyond our Borders' column focuses on selected and current international diseases that may affect South Africans travelling abroad. Numbers correspond to Figure 6 on page 20.

### 1. Pope Francis visiting Mexico

Pope Francis will be visiting Mexico from 12-18 February 2016 and the assembling of large crowds at many occasions is expected. Mass gatherings such as these pose significant health and safety risks for attendees. Transmission of communicable diseases is likely and accidents leading physical injury are a persistent risk. Mexico is currently experiencing a Zika virus outbreak amidst the larger on-going outbreak in Central and South America. The potential for further spreading of the Zika virus is present. The USA CDC has issued special recommendations for pregnant women traveling to Mexico in addition to specific safety recommendations pertaining to mass gatherings. (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/travel-to-mass-gatherings>)

### 2. Yellow Fever in Angola

A yellow fever outbreak is currently ongoing in Angola. The latest cases have occurred in Huila province, close to the Namibian border where 8 deaths have been reported amongst 41 suspected cases. As of 12<sup>th</sup> February, there have been over 250 suspected cases and 51 registered deaths. Viana municipality in Luanda Province is the most affected, with 92 cases and 29 deaths, followed by Huila Province. Travellers to Angola need a yellow fever vaccine at least 10 days prior to their trip, including official certification. General mosquito bite prevention steps are also advised. Persons travelling to South Africa from Angola require a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate

### 3. Northern hemisphere seasonal influenza

The Global Influenza Programme monitors influenza activity worldwide and publishes an update every two weeks. They reported an increase in levels of influenza activity in the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere on 08 February 2016. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 is the most detected virus.

Measures to help prevent influenza virus infections during travel include avoiding close contact with sick people, washing hands often with soap and water, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, avoiding touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth. See article on page 9 regarding preparation for the southern hemisphere influenza season.

### 4. Human infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus – China

From 21 December 2015 to 25 January 2016, 28 laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus, including five deaths, were reported from China. Cases originated from 6 provinces and no clusters were found. The majority (25 cases, 89%) reported exposure to live poultry or live poultry markets.

WHO advises that travellers to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza should avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live bird markets, entering areas where poultry may be slaughtered, and contact with any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with animal or poultry faeces. Travellers should practise regular hand washing with soap and water and should follow good food safety practices at all times.

### 5. Ebola - Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea

See article on page 14.

### 6. Zika virus –Thailand

Several cases of Zika virus infection have been reported in Thailand. Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy and their partners who had hoped to visit Thailand may wish to reconsider their travel plans. Zika virus is a mild infection and asymptomatic in over 75% of persons. Acquisition of Zika can be prevented through prevention of mosquito bites. See article on page 2.

### 7. Zika virus in South America and Caribbean

See article on page 2.

### **References:**

[www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org)  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

**Source:** Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS ([outbreak@nicd.ac.za](mailto:outbreak@nicd.ac.za))



**Figure 6.** Current outbreaks that may have implications for travellers. Number correspond to text above. The red dot is the approximate location of the outbreak or event