

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 8 on page 19.

1. Measles (United Kingdom)

The Public Health England agency has reported a rise in measles cases, having confirmed 20 cases across London, Cambridge, Essex and Hertfordshire since February 2016, mainly diagnosed in adolescents and young adults (ages 14 – 40). The agency urged members of the public to check with their GPs that their measles vaccines are up-to-date. Measles is a highly infectious disease commonly affecting children that is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth and throat of infected people. Initial symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, bloodshot eyes and tiny whitish spots in the mouth. This is followed by a rash on the face and neck which then spreads downwards. Most patients recover in 2 to 3 weeks. Many countries include measles vaccination as part of their nationwide public health programs. The recent increase in cases, particularly in first world countries, has been linked to a decrease in immunisation coverage.

2. Hepatitis E (India)

The Ministry of Health reported on 12 February 2016 that about 15 000 persons had been affected by the disease and that 6 persons have died so far this year. As at 7 March 2016 more than 500 cases of jaundice have been reported in the city of Shimla, in the province of Himachal Pradesh in the past few weeks. Half the families in the Shimla town were reported to have been affected by the outbreak. The outbreak has been traced to contaminated water being supplied to Shimla from the Ashwani Khad, which is a rivulet that is the town's main drinking water source. The contamination has been caused by sewage making its way into the rivulet as a result of the sewage treatment plant (STP) at Malyana being non-functional. Water supply from Ashwani Khad has been stopped. Kulgam district in South Kashmir, is another district affected by hepatitis E outbreaks. The outbreak is reportedly under control following public health actions taken by the ministry.

3. Yellow fever (Angola)

See article on page 13

4. Ebola virus disease (Guinea)

See article on page 12

5. Cholera (Kenya)

Kenya is currently tackling a cholera outbreak in the

Mandera County, with 35 cases being reported in the week ending 12 March 2016. Public health officials have reassured the public and report being in a position of adequate readiness to combat the outbreak. With the 1st case of cholera being reported on 1 Mar 2016, involving a student who showed signs while at school, the disease has spread to 3 other villages in Mandera East Sub-County. The public health officials report that they are currently treating 20 patients while carrying out public health campaigns in Bula Mpya, Bula Hamari, Shafshafey, and Barwaqo regions.

6. Zika Virus (South and Central America)

See article on page 3

7. Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) (Saudi Arabia)

As of noon 14 Mar 2016, there has been a total of 1 345 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV infection including, 569 deaths (case fatality rate 42.3%), 751 recoveries, and 25 currently active cases (including 3 asymptomatic infections). Travellers are advised to continue exercising good hygiene practices in order to prevent upper and lower respiratory tract infections with the virus.

8. Influenza

In the Northern Hemisphere high levels of influenza activity continued with influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 predominating (Canada, USA, Western Asia, Northern Africa) as well as an increase in the proportion of influenza B viruses detected in these regions. In the Southern Hemisphere and in tropical countries influenza activity was generally low. In tropical countries of the Americas, Central America and the Caribbean, influenza and other respiratory virus activity were at low levels, with the exception of Jamaica, and Puerto Rico with somewhat high but decreasing influenza activity. In South East Asia, continued low influenza activity was reported during this period. In the temperate countries of the Southern Hemisphere influenza activity remained low at inter-seasonal level. Precautionary seasonal influenza vaccination administration prior to international travel, as well as adequate hand-washing practices are advised to travellers.

References

<http://www.promedmail.org/>

<http://www.who.int/topics/measles/en/>

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



Figure 8. 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