

## b Emergence of the Asian strain of Zika virus in Cape Verde

According to the WHO situation report released on 18 May 2016\*, 60 countries report continuing mosquito-borne transmission of Zika virus. Argentina is the latest country to report mosquito-borne transmission. Four countries have experienced a Zika virus outbreak between 2007 and 2014, but no longer have ongoing transmission. Complications associated with Zika virus infection, namely microcephaly and Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS), have been reported in eight and 13 countries respectively. The WHO reports that there is "scientific consensus that Zika virus is the cause of microcephaly and GBS".

In the African region, the Republic of Cape Verde in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa, is currently experiencing an outbreak, and there is evidence that Zika virus was circulating in Gabon between 2007 and 2014. As of 8 May 2016, there were over 7 500 suspected cases with three cases of microcephaly reported from the Republic of Cape Verde. Available sequencing data indicate that the Zika virus in Cape Verde is an Asian and not African lineage. This has a number of epidemiological implications for countries on the African continent. Although Zika virus was first identified in Africa and appears to be widespread in a number of African countries based on serological surveys, the Asian lineage of the virus appears to have acquired

increased and new virulence during the last 20 years. Zika virus may therefore pose an increased risk to public health on the African continent.

The WHO has urged African countries to re-evaluate their level of risk, and increase their level of preparedness and prevention activities. Measures proposed include: 1) increasing or implementing vector surveillance and control; 2) implementing surveillance measures for Zika-associated congenital malformations and GBS; 3) strengthening laboratory capacity; and 4) strengthening community engagement and risk communications. A number of South Africans are preparing to participate or attend the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, this year. Team members and visitors have been advised to avoid mosquito bites, seek medical attention should they develop symptoms compatible with Zika virus infection (rash, fever, joint pains or conjunctivitis), and use condoms to prevent potential sexual transmission during or after visiting Brazil.

\*[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/206537/1/zikasitrep\\_19May2016\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/206537/1/zikasitrep_19May2016_eng.pdf)

**Source:** Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, NICD-NHLS