A message from the OHS Division
2 February 2016

Mosquito-borne diseases
(including Zika virus)

Mosquito-borne and other insect-borne viruses that can be transmitted from mosquitoes and insects to people, are a factor to be considered by staff who participate in travel and fieldwork as part of their work at UQ.

What is the Zika virus?
Staff may have noticed recent media articles in relation to the Zika virus (ZIKV) outbreak in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. Mosquitoes carrying ZIKV are particularly active around dawn and dusk. The infection often occurs without symptoms but in some cases can cause fever, rash, severe headache, joint pain, and muscle or bone pain. Illness from Zika is usually not severe and does not require hospitalisation. There is no vaccine for Zika. Prevention relies on avoiding mosquito bites in areas where Zika occurs.

Currently there are 22 nations in the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Africa and the Pacific Islands where Zika is known to be transmitted. The complete list is found at the Australian government smartraveller Zika Virus Bulletin. Further cases of Zika virus may be reported in the future from other countries, especially those near countries with ongoing Zika transmission, or those where the mosquito vectors are present.

Who is affected?
Women who are pregnant or seeking to become pregnant should reconsider their travel plans to areas where Zika is known to be transmitted, due to the concerns about the possibility of severe outcomes for unborn babies. If they do travel or work in these areas, they should stringently adhere to mosquito bite avoidance advice, and discuss their travel plans and mosquito bite avoidance techniques with their doctor.

If staff who are pregnant or seeking to become pregnant have recently returned from any of the affected countries and have health concerns, they should contact their treating doctor and advise them of their recent travel.

How can I stay informed?
Areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are difficult to determine and likely to change over time. UQ staff and students planning travel to the affected areas should stay informed by smartraveller updates.

More information is available from:
Zika Factsheet – the basics at the OHS Division website
Department of Health (Australian Government)
World Health Organisation Zika factsheets
Smartraveller Zika virus update
Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention - Pregnancy Guidelines

Avoiding mosquito bites

Anyone travelling to areas of concern should stringently adhere to mosquito bite avoidance advice and discuss their travel plans and mosquito bite avoidance with their doctor.
Travellers should follow recommendations to avoid mosquito bites at all times when travelling in overseas countries where there is a risk of mosquito-borne diseases. This is particularly important if you are or could be pregnant as there are a range of diseases such as malaria that are a serious risk for pregnant women.

You should:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants;
- Use insect repellents containing DEET or picaridin. Always use as directed;
- Insect repellents containing DEET or picaridin are safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children older than 2 months when used according to the product label;
- If you use both sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and then the repellent;
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents);
- Use bed nets as necessary; and
- Stay and sleep in screened or air-conditioned rooms.

Other mosquito-borne viruses

Other viruses that can be transmitted from mosquitoes to people and that may also pose health risks during travel and fieldwork are listed below along with authoritative links to precautionary information. Where applicable, risk management strategies to prevent the transmission of these viruses to travel and fieldwork participants, should be included when planning and conducting travel and fieldwork.

Mosquito-borne and other insect-borne diseases – DFAT Smartraveller

Yellow fever - Australian Government Department of Health
http://www.cdc.gov/yellowfever/

Malaria - Center for Diseases Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/travelers/index.html

Dengue fever - Australian Government Department of Health Center for Diseases Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/dengue/

Japanese encephalitis – Center for Diseases Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/japaneseencephalitis/index.html

Chikungunya – Center for Diseases Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/chikungunya/

Travel planning

Risk Assessment
The risk of mosquito-borne diseases should be considered and included where necessary in Risk assessments for travel and fieldwork risk assessments for travel and fieldwork.
Staff or students travelling or conducting fieldwork should also refer to the UQ Fieldwork and Work Off-Campus Guideline and the DFAT Smartraveller country advice for their destination. Updated information should be sought where appropriate.

Approval of travel at UQ requires completion of appropriate OHS risk management planning.

The UQ travel emergency provider ACE Assistance should be contacted in the case of medical emergency or for other services as detailed below. The contact phone number for ACE Assistance is +61 2 8907 5995.

ACE Assistance provides the following services:

- Emergency Medical Assistance and Advice
- Evacuation or repatriation if necessary
- Liaison and case management with hospital/medical provider
- Liaison and case management with ACE Insurance
- Pre-travel advice
- Emergency travel assistance
- Assistance in replacing a lost or stolen passport
- Legal assistance
- Assistance in tracing delayed or lost luggage
- Assistance in arranging medical appointments and hospital admission
- Emergency medical advice 24 hours per day
- Advice and information on the location of physicians, hospitals, dentists and dental clinics worldwide