OJPHI

ISDS 2016 Conference Abstracts

ISDS INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

Houston Health Department's response to the threat of Zika virus

Eric V. Bakota*, Kirstin Short and Amanda Eckert

Health Department, City of Houston, Houston, TX, USA

Objective

This session will explore the role of the Houston Health Department (HHD) in the City of Houston's response to the threat of Zika. The panelists will provide perspective from the roles of Bureau Chief, informatician, and epidemiologist and provide insight into lessons learned and strategic successes.

Introduction

Zika virus spread quickly through South and Central America in 2015. The City of Houston saw its first travel-related Zika cases in December of 2015. On January 29th, the City held the first planning meeting with regional partners from healthcare, blood banks, petrochemical companies, mosquito control, and others. Additionally the City activated Incident Command Structure (ICS) and designated the Public Health Authority as the Incident Commander.

Initial steps taken by HHD included expanding the capability and capacity of the public health laboratory to test for Zika virus; expand surveillance efforts; created an educational campaign around the "3Ds" of Zika defense (Drain, Dress, DEET) which were then disseminated through several means, including a mass mailing with water bills; and provided DEET to mothers through the WIC program.

The Houston Health Department took the lead in authoring the City's Zika Action Plan. In this 3 goals and 6 strategies were identified. Goals included 1) Keep Houstonians and visitors aware of the threat of Zika; 2) minimize the spread of the virus; and 3) protect pregnant women from the virus. The 6 strategies employed were to A) develop preparedness plans; B) implement ICS within the City; C) ensure situational awareness through surveillance; D) Increase community awareness; E) reduce opportunities for Zika mosquito breeding grounds; and F) provide direct intervention to reduce the threat of Zika.

HHD was responsible for many of the action items within the plan. We conducted several community outreach events, where we disseminated educational materials, t-shirts, DEET, and other give-aways. These events allowed frequent engagement with the public for bidirectional communication on how to approach the threat.

Keywords

Zika; Planning; Information sharing; Informatics; Epidemiology

***Eric V. Bakota**
E-mail: eric.bakota@gmail.com