

Dear Industry Partners

### **Re: Zika Virus**

The Belize Tourism Board continues to receive updates from the Ministry of Health regarding the Zika virus. Getting you updated information as it becomes available is a top priority. In the meantime, below you will find:

1. Key Message for stakeholders to utilize in communication with visitors and guests.
2. Update from the Ministry of Health
3. General information about the virus as well as general questions you or your visitors may have about its impact.

**KEY MESSAGE: At this time, it is important to note that the Zika virus has not spread to Belize. As a precaution for visitors traveling to the Belize, you are encouraged to wear long sleeves and long pants and/or liberally apply insect repellent when appropriate. We remain in contact with the Ministry of Health and the Belize Tourism Board regarding the Zika virus and will continue to share information as it becomes available.**

### **Update from the Ministry of Health (MOH)**

The Ministry of Health has been sensitizing the media and has sent out 3 press releases on the Zika Virus, dating back to November of last year.

Note also that the MOH is utilizing the same plans that were developed for Dengue and Chikungunya, as they are all transmitted by the same vector.

The MOH is aware of the ongoing news stories and queries via media (social and printed) but the following is the updated position on Belize:

- There hasn't been a confirmed case of Zika in Belize
- We are looking at avenues for testing for Zika beyond sending the samples to Trinidad (so far the Gorgas Institute in Panama has offered to help)
- Our efforts in terms of spraying and vector control measures continue
- As soon as we have any other major information, we will be passing that along to all relevant stakeholders

We will also be providing relevant updates on our social media pages.

## **General information about the ZIKA virus**

### **1: What is Zika virus?**

Zika virus is spread to people through mosquito bites. The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually very mild with symptoms lasting from several days to a week. Severe symptoms requiring hospitalization is uncommon.

### **2: How does the virus spread?**

It spreads exclusively through mosquitos. These mosquitoes typically lay eggs in and near standing water in things like buckets, bowls, animal dishes, flower pots and vases. They are aggressive daytime biters, prefer to bite people, and live indoors and outdoors near people. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on a person already infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites.

### **3: Where have outbreaks occurred?**

Outbreaks of Zika have sporadically occurred for many years in areas of Africa and Southeast Asia. Because the Aedes species mosquitoes that spread Zika virus are found throughout the world, it is likely that outbreaks will spread to new countries. It has been found in 14 Central and South American countries: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Suriname and Venezuela. It has recently surfaced in several states in the USA.

### **4: Why is it of concern now?**

There's been growing evidence linking Zika infection in pregnant women to a rare condition called microcephaly, in which the child is born with a birth defect where the head is smaller than normal and the brain has not developed properly. U.S. health officials are heading to Brazil, where there's been a recent spike in the birth defect, to further study the actual risk to pregnant women.

There is no medicine or vaccine for the Zika virus. Hospitalizations are rare and no deaths have been reported as a result of the virus.

### **5: What you can do to limit the spread of the virus:**

- Stay informed about the Zika situation in your country, and in other Caribbean countries.
- Provide staff and guests with information on Zika so that they are aware of the signs and symptoms, how Zika is transmitted and how it can be prevented.

- Consider placing and having insect repellents in every room, or having them available for purchase.
- Avoid storing water in outdoor containers to prevent them from becoming mosquito breeding sites.
- Cover water tanks or reservoirs so that mosquitoes do not get in.
- Avoid the build-up of garbage, which can act as a breeding site for mosquitoes. Put garbage in closed plastic bags and keep it in closed containers.
- Uncover/unblock gutters and drains to release stagnant water.
- Install mosquito screening on windows and doors to help reduce contact between mosquitoes and guests.
- Consider supplying guests with bed nets in areas where the sleeping quarters are exposed to the outdoors.