

Written Testimony for:
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Florida's State Surgeon General &
Secretary of Health

Testimony to Committee on Oversight & Government Reform
February 24, 2016, 2 p.m.
Rayburn Building 2154

Opening

- Florida has a long tradition of combatting and eradicating mosquito-borne diseases. In fact, the Department of Health's predecessor the State Board of Health was created in 1889 as a result of a yellow fever epidemic.
- Human mosquito-borne disease outbreaks in Florida in modern time have been local and of short duration. Approach has consistently been three-fold:
 - Mosquito control (larvicides and pesticides)
 - Public information campaign (drain standing water and cover up)
 - Health professional education (early recognition of mosquito-borne diseases)

Examples:

- West Nile, 2003 (Most active year in the U.S):
 - 94 confirmed cases in Florida compared to 9,862 nationally
 - Containing the Dengue cases Key West in 2009 with door-to-door inspections with remediation and a public information campaign.
 - 27 cases statewide in 2009
 - Chikungunya 2014: 11 locally transmitted cases; 2015: 0 locally transmitted cases.
- First, I would like to provide an update on the status of the Zika virus in Florida followed by an overview on how Florida successfully operationalized CDC guidance to protect our residents and the visitors to our state.

Zika Virus Status

- To date, we have had no transmission of the Zika virus in the state of Florida.
- Through education with our health care professionals our department has reported several travel-related Zika cases to the CDC. Travel-related cases are defined as a disease believed to be contracted outside of the state prior to arrival. In total, Florida has reported 28 travel-related cases to the federal government; none of the confirmed cases in Florida involve pregnant women.
- The 28 cases are in 10 Florida counties (Alachua, Broward, Hillsborough, Lee, Miami-Dade, Osceola, Santa Rosa, Brevard, Orange and St. Johns).
- We currently have the laboratory capacity to conduct 4,859 viral tests (active zika) and 1,268 antibody tests (presence of Zika in the past) in two of our FL DOH labs in Jacksonville and Tampa.

- We have been conducting approximately 300 tests a week and reporting positive results to our partners and the public daily.
 - 160 PCR specimens weekly
 - 128 enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (EIA) specimens

Florida Response

- Recognizing the increase of travel-related cases of Zika in Florida, on February 1 Governor Rick Scott requested a briefing with the CDC on the Zika virus.
- On that call we confirmed that Aedes mosquitos, the carriers of Zika, are common in Florida and there are potential links with the virus and microcephaly as well as neurological disorders including Guillain- Barre Syndrome.
- What was most clear from that briefing is that there is a need for more concrete and scientifically sound information from the CDC about this disease. The fact remains very little information about the different ways this disease is transmitted and the impacts it has after an individual becomes infected.
- Based on the information from that meeting and the tripling of travel-related cases in a week (3 to 9), on February 3 Governor Scott issued an Executive Order directing me to declare of public health emergency in the counties with diagnosed travel-related cases.
- On the same day, I declared a public health emergency in the impacted counties at that time and have since added counties to the declaration as new travel-related cases are identified.
- The public health emergency included three key directives.
 - Notification of Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture who has the authority to enact a threat to animal health and oversees the Office of Mosquito Control which is connected with Florida’s local mosquito control boards.
 - Mobilization of local leaders to coordinate mosquito control efforts and public outreach to vulnerable populations and report back to the Department of Health with meeting summary and action plans.
 - Activates local outreach to medical professionals with up-to-date CDC guidance to increase awareness and access to diagnostic tools.

- As a department, we established an incident command team to comprehensively address readiness activities.

Lab Capacity

- Florida has one of the premier state lab systems in the country with the central laboratory in Jacksonville and branch laboratories in Miami and Tampa.
- When the public health emergency was issued, Governor Scott recognized that with over 20 million residents and over 100 million tourists, Florida must stay ahead of the possible spread of the Zika virus and our lab capacity plays essential in role in that effort.
- Governor Scott called on the CDC to provide at least 1,000 Zika antibody tests so the state can test individuals, especially pregnant women and new mothers, who have traveled to affected areas and had symptoms of Zika. The antibody test allows the state to see if individuals ever had the Zika virus. At that time, Florida had the capacity to test only 475 people.
- He called on FL DOH to have at least 4,000 viral tests which are commercially available and were ordered the next day.
- On February 9, the CDC provided Florida with 950 antibody tests, bringing the state's total to 1,425.
- With our existing lab infrastructure and the needed testing resources we are now equipped to work with medical professionals to test patients with symptoms of the Zika virus and associated travel history to an impacted country, as CDC guidance indicates.

Medical Professional Outreach

- The FL DOH licenses all Florida medical professionals as such has existing communications channels with our licensees.
- We have used these channels to share CDC guidance on the disease, treatment and testing protocols, as well as recent FDA recommendations for blood donation as they pertain to individuals who have been to areas with active Zika virus transmission.
- We have also emphasized universal standards of care as an added precaution and general best practice.
- On February 12, at the request of Governor Scott, the CDC hosted a conference call for Florida medical professionals to provide information on the symptoms, treatments and proper precautions for Zika. Nearly 600 medical professionals dialed in to the call to hear directly from the CDC on the measures they need to take to protect their patients.

- Strengthening the connection between practitioners and the public health system is key when tracking and suppressing the spread of disease.
- We remain in frequent contact with the CDC and the FDA for the latest guidelines on how best prepare communities in Florida.

Public Outreach

- We feel that keeping the public informed is one of the best ways to educate and calm fears.
- At the direction of Governor Scott, we established a Zika Virus Information Hotline for Florida residents and visitors, as well as anyone planning on traveling to Florida in the near future. We want Florida residents and visitors have access to an open line of communication to receive the latest updates, get answers to questions and advice on what steps they can take to protect their homes and families.
- DOH issues a daily press release with up-to-date diagnoses counts and tips for Floridians on how to protect themselves and their families.
- We established a web page with links to CDC guidance and information for the public on community meetings.
- Developed infographics to plainly explain the virus and mosquito protection best practices, which have been requested for rebranding by other states.
- We've made materials and presentations available to our 67 county health officers to provide to community stakeholders and partners.
- These are the key messages we are sharing about the Zika Virus:
 - Travelers from Zika-infected countries should have protected sex for at least a month upon returning to the United States, due to the lingering presence of the virus in various bodily fluids.
 - Anyone who is pregnant or intends to become pregnant should not travel to a country with active Zika virus transmission.
 - The best way we can prevent arboviruses is through mosquito control: eliminate any sources of standing water where the mosquito can breed, use mosquito repellent, use screens to cover windows and doors and cover up with proper clothing.

- Our residents will play an important role in helping prevent the spread of the Zika virus and we want them to have all the information they need to join in the effort.

Conclusion:

- In Florida, we have developed a proven, seamless model to take CDC guidance from the federal government and get it to our health practitioners, partners and citizens to protect our residents and visitors from emerging mosquito-borne diseases.
- Although it seems unprecedented in nature, I'm confident that our history as a department has prepared us to address this issue. In the past, we have had success in containing other mosquito-borne illnesses such as chikungunya virus and dengue virus, with systems of readiness that mirrors the level of preparedness we currently maintain.
- We have made it a priority to stay ahead of the possible spread of this virus in Florida, and we will continue to do all we can to keep Floridians safe.

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Florida's State Surgeon General & Secretary of Health

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG, MD, FACS, was appointed by Governor Rick Scott as Surgeon General and Secretary of Health for the State of Florida in April 2012. He leads a \$2.8 billion department of 15,000 public health professionals and 67 county health departments, all working together to promote local public health, provide health professional regulation, and ensure medical disaster readiness. During the past three years, he has led the state's successful responses to tuberculosis, meningitis from contaminated steroids, Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Ebola, and measles. Dr. Armstrong came to state government from the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, where he was Chief Medical Officer of the USF Health Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation (CAMLs), Associate Professor of Surgery, and an attending trauma surgeon. He is a graduate of Princeton University, the University of Virginia School of Medicine, and the US Army Command and General Staff College. He performed his surgical residency at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, HI, his trauma/surgical critical care fellowship at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital, and his Master Educators in Medical Education Fellowship at the University of Florida. He is a US Army veteran and completed his career in the Medical Corps at the rank of Colonel in 2005.