



## Department of Health

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Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to my third letter to the state's physicians. I'm writing to you this month about two important topics: Zika virus and naloxone.

**Zika Virus:** As you know, the World Health Organization has declared Zika a public health emergency of international concern. The main public health concern is reports of increased cases of microcephaly associated with women who experienced Zika infections during pregnancy. Generally, only one in five people infected with Zika virus get sick, and the symptoms are usually very mild and short lived. Symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis. As of now, there is no vaccine or medicine to prevent or treat Zika.

We are learning more every day about Zika and possible routes of transmission. While Zika virus is primarily transmitted by *Aedes* species of mosquito, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published reports of increasing numbers of confirmed and probable sexual transmission of Zika virus, including several involving pregnant women.

To date in New York, the Wadsworth Center at the New York State Department of Health (Department) has conducted tests on samples from more than 1,600 patients, and as of today, 46 positive cases have been confirmed. With the exception of one possible case of sexual transmission, all of the infected patients have been returning travelers from countries where Zika virus is ongoing.

Until more is known, CDC and NYSDOH recommend that men who have traveled to or lived in an area with active Zika virus transmission and are sexual partners of pregnant women abstain from sex, or consistently and correctly use latex condoms for the duration of the pregnancy. Zika has been found in the saliva, urine, and semen of infected individuals.

The Department is offering free Zika testing to:

- pregnant women who, during their pregnancy, have had unprotected sex with a partner who lives in or has traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission.
- pregnant women who themselves have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission during their pregnancy,
- non-pregnant women, men or children who develop symptoms of Zika virus within four weeks of travel to an area with active Zika virus transmission.

Physicians and hospitals are required to report all suspected cases of Zika virus and can send serum and urine samples for testing.

I urge you to visit the [CDC](#) and [Department](#) websites to follow Zika developments, participate in our continuing series of webinars, and download fact sheets and posters to share with your patients. This is also where you will find updates about our New York State Mosquito

Surveillance and Response Plan, developed in collaboration with local health departments in the southern counties likely to have *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes.

**Naloxone:** As most of you know, heroin and prescription opioid abuse has become a major public health problem in New York and the rest of the nation. In New York alone, there were 121,000 hospital admissions for heroin and prescription opioid abuse treatment in 2014, a 20 percent increase from the 101,000 admitted in 2009. Sadly, some people eventually overdose on these drugs. Most overdoses occur in people under the age of 29, young adults in the prime of their lives. In 2013, there were 1,230 deaths from overdoses of opioids, including heroin, up from 924 in 2009.

To help prevent overdoses from becoming deadly, the Department has been aggressively training people to administer naloxone. Naloxone, as you know, quickly reverses the effects of the opioid drug. Since the Department launched the overdose prevention program in 2006, a total of 100,000 individuals in the community have been trained to use naloxone; over half of them were trained in the last twelve months. The Department has also trained firefighters, law enforcement and incarcerated individuals, who are soon to be released, on how to use naloxone. As of December 2015, naloxone has been administered more than 3,000 times.

To further increase access, the Department has also made [Naloxone available without a prescription](#) in pharmacies statewide.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
Commissioner of Health