03 March 2016 – The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean invited representatives from ministries of health in the Region to 2 rounds of emergency meetings to share information on Zika virus infection and associated conditions and discuss implementation of public health measures to prepare for, and respond to, any possible spread in the Region. To date, no case of Zika virus infection has been reported from any country in the Region, either through local transmission or importation via travel from a Zika-affected country. However, the Region remains at risk as the *Aedes* mosquito that transmits the virus to humans is present in at least 8 countries – Djibouti, Egypt, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

The meeting concluded with agreement on a set of recommendations for urgent implementation in order to keep the Region free from the threat of Zika virus infection. These included to:

- enhance disease surveillance to early detect cases of Zika virus infection and notify WHO as soon as such cases occur;
- establish laboratory facilities for diagnosis and testing capacities for Zika virus infection, including establishing appropriate links with external reference laboratories for sample processing;
- strengthen entomological surveillance, especially in hotspot areas, including at ports and airports, to pre-empt and detect occurrence of high densities of *Aedes* mosquitoes and target these areas for vector control;
- establish appropriate measures at points of entry, such as disinsecting conveyances arriving from a country with active Zika virus transmission;
- conduct regular public awareness campaigns to proactively inform the public of the Zika virus situation focusing on travellers to areas with active transmission through issuance of appropriate advisories to reduce the possibility of exposure to mosquito bites;
- urge communities to keep areas in and around the home free from mosquito breeding sites through applying appropriate risk communication messages and strategies in accordance with local culture and behavioural practice, and provide communities with the appropriate knowledge, information and tools to protect themselves from mosquito bites;
- identify and establish a network of experts, reference laboratories and training centres in the Region to support Member States in the areas of entomological surveillance, vector control, field investigation and laboratory detection.

A regional plan to enhance preparedness and readiness to prevent, early detect and respond to the introduction and local transmission of Zika virus in high-risk areas was also agreed upon during the 2 rounds of meetings. WHO will implement this plan over the next 6months in the Region, in collaboration with ministries of health and other regional and international health

partners.

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