

Update on Zika from the American Congress of Ob/Gyn  
March 7 2016

Reuters (3/4, Rampton) reported the White House and CDC announced an April 1 summit aimed at developing a plan, in conjunction with local and state health officials, to fight the Zika virus. CDC Principal Deputy Director Dr. Anne Schuchat explained in an interview that her agency is eager to hold the summit after learning Zika may be sexually transmitted, which could spread the virus faster.

A separate Reuters (3/4, Nebehay, Rampton) article quoted Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, as saying, “We can’t say for sure that we’re not going to have a major outbreak in the United States. I do not think we will, but we will be prepared for it anyway.”

Growing Evidence Links Zika To Birth Defects. The Washington Post (3/4, Sun, Dennis) reported the links between the Zika virus and “devastating health effects on women and unborn babies grew significantly stronger Friday as new studies from two continents detailed how the pathogen could attack fetal brain development as well as trigger complications at any stage of pregnancy.” According to the Post, the latest research “reinforce[s] an increasing consensus that the virus can have tragic consequences for pregnant women and their fetuses.”

The Wall Street Journal (3/4, A3, McKay, Subscription Publication) explained one study found the virus targeted cells crucial for brain development while another raised the likelihood the virus could cause problems for women in the third trimester of their pregnancy.

In a nearly 1,300-word article, the New York Times (3/4, McNeil, Louis, Subscription Publication) said “the reports are far from conclusive, but the studies help shed light on a mysterious epidemic that has swept across more than two dozen countries in the Western Hemisphere, alarming citizens and unnerving public health officials.” Fauci stated the studies are “going to have a chilling effect. Now there’s almost no doubt that Zika is the cause.” While he pointed to the small sample size as a limitation of the study, Fauci said, “There will be other studies that I believe will corroborate this.”

The AP (3/4, Neergaard, Ritter) reported Dr. Christopher Zahn of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said while “we still have many unanswered questions,” the latest data provide “additional evidence suggesting an association between Zika virus and negative obstetrical outcomes, including birth defects and fetal demise.”

In a more than 1,400-word article, USA Today (3/4, Szabo) highlighted a study published online Friday in the New England Journal of Medicine that “found major abnormalities in 29% of the fetuses from women who tested positive for Zika, but none of the women without Zika infections.”

Fauci appeared on NBC’s Today Show (3/6) to discuss the Zika virus, mentioning the new study and expressing that “there is an alarmingly high percentage of women who are infected with Zika who actually have abnormalities in the fetus.” He said that this was the “first very strong

study” that gives evidence of the link between Zika virus and microcephaly. Fauci also mentioned that the NIH is on a “very fast track” and hopes to get into Phase I clinical trials by the end of the summer.

Another USA Today (3/4, Dobson) article discussed the second study, which was published Friday in Cell Stem Cell, that “uncovered evidence that the Zika virus specifically targets developing brain cells, leading to stunted brain development.” Professors at Florida State University, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and Emory University Hospital “found the virus targets a cell type called human embryonic cortical neural progenitors in as little as three days after” exposure and “discovered that those infected cells replicate the Zika virus, posing potential treatment problems, and that the virus is directly interfering with cell growth and function.”