

# Vigilance against Zika virus should 'remain high,' UN health agency says in new guidance

10 March 2017 – Although a decline in cases of Zika virus infection has been reported in some countries, there is still a need for heightened vigilance, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported today, issuing fresh guidance on the virus that has been linked to birth defects and neurological complications.

The new WHO data also lists countries where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is present, but where there is no sign of the Zika virus.

The insect is considered to be the main transmitter of the disease, which has been identified in more than 80 countries to date.

As such, WHO says that overall, the global risk assessment has not changed and “the [Zika virus] continues to spread geographically to areas where competent vectors are present.

The current data adds some 70 countries to the list of those considered to be ‘at-risk.’ These are countries where there’s no sign of the virus, but where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is present; it is considered to be the main carrier of the virus.

Speaking to *UN News* in Geneva, WHO technical Officer Monika Gehner said: “[The new guidance] helps us because now we can assess risks more precisely. Now, even if you do not have Zika virus transmission, but if you have the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, you are at risk of Zika virus transmission.”

She went on to stress that amid surging global travel, “a traveller who is infected with Zika virus may go to an area in a country and in fact mosquitos that are established there, and a mosquito can then transmit to other people and so on, so you have a cycle of transmission.”

The aim of this new WHO guidance is not to spread alarm. Instead, it’s a call to governments to do more to prevent the spread of Zika.

This requires greater surveillance of mosquito populations and research into suspected Zika infections, as well as better diagnostic techniques and updated health advice to at-risk communities and travellers.

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## Next intra-Syrian talks set for late March – UN envoy

9 March 2017 – The next round of the United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian talks is expected to convene on 23 March to discuss issues related to governance, constitution, elections and counter terrorism, the UN Special Envoy for Syria has said.

“My current intention is to bring the invitees back to Geneva for a fifth round with a target date of 23 March,” Staffan de Mistura told reporters yesterday at the UN Headquarters in New York after he briefed the Security Council on the outcome of the fourth round of the discussions, which ran in the Swiss city from 23 February to 3 March.

He said the fourth round of the Geneva talks “achieved much more than many people had imagined we could have.”

“No one left, everybody stayed. They were focused, we got an agenda, we got a timeline, we got some agreement on substance,” Mr. de Mistura said, noting that the fifth round of talks will build on the outcome of the previous one and that counter terrorism is now part of the agenda laid out in UN Security Council resolution 2254.

In parallel with the UN-facilitated intra-Syrian talks, Kazakhstan has been hosting talks on a ceasefire in its capital, Astana – diplomatic efforts led by the so-named ceasefire guarantors, Iran, Russia and Turkey.

On the Astana talks, Mr. de Mistura said that although the responsibility of their success is in the hands of these guarantors, the UN dispatches a technical team to the process, because without a strong ceasefire, the UN-facilitated Geneva talks would be fragile.

The UN envoy urged the Security Council to continue to support his efforts.

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## Yemen: UNICEF vaccination campaign reaches 5 million children

9 March 2017 – Amid escalating violence, the United Nations humanitarian agency for children and its partners have completed the first round of a nationwide door-to-door vaccination campaign reaching 5 million children under the age of five with oral polio vaccine and vitamin A supplementation.

“In the last two years, more children have died from preventable

diseases than those killed in the violence,&#8221 said Meritxell Relaño, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Yemen, in a press release. &#8220This is why vaccination campaigns are so crucial to save the lives of Yemen’s children and to secure their future.&#8221

In the first campaign of its kind this year, 40,000 vaccinators spread across Yemen to provide children with polio vaccine and vitamin A supplements. Mobile health teams have reached children wherever they are, including in places where access to health services has been cut off by the fighting. Health workers have shown heroic resolve in crossing frontlines, mountains and valleys to vaccinate children.

UNICEF says that the campaign comes at a critical time. Children in Yemen are living on the brink of famine and widespread malnutrition has drastically increased their risk of disease. More than half of Yemen’s medical facilities are no longer functional and the health system is on the verge of collapse.

UNICEF is scaling up its humanitarian response, including support for the treatment of 323,000 children against severe acute malnutrition, and the provision of basic healthcare services to one million children and over half a million pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

&#8220Children are dying because the conflict is preventing them from getting the health care and nutrition they urgently need. Their immune systems are weak from months of hunger,&#8221 said Dr. Relaño, calling on all parties to the conflict to find a political solution to this crisis.

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## [UN chief Guterres unveils proposals to end ‘scourge’ of sexual exploitation and abuse](#)

9 March 2017 – Underscoring that the United Nations should not be, in any way, associated with the vile and vicious crimes of rape, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, Secretary-General António Guterres has outlined a new victim-centred approach to prevent and respond to such abuses committed by those serving under the UN flag.

&#8220Such acts of cruelty should never take place. Certainly no person serving with the United Nations in any capacity should be associated with such vile and vicious crimes,&#8221 said Mr. Guterres in a message announcing his report released today on ‘Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach.’

&#8220Let us declare in one voice: We will not tolerate anyone committing or condoning sexual exploitation and abuse. We will not let anyone cover up

these crimes with the UN flag,&#8221 he added.

The Secretary-General's report, *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach*, outlines a victim-centred strategy that is rooted in transparency, accountability and ensuring justice.

Noting that exploitation is also deeply rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, Mr. Guterres said that promoting gender equality throughout the UN system, including its missions and peacekeeping forces, would help advance parity and at the same time decrease incidents of abuse.

&#8220Let us do so in the name of all who look to the UN for life-saving protection and support &#8211 and on behalf of the tens of thousands of UN personnel around the world who deliver that assistance with courage and commitment to the highest ideals,&#8221 he stressed.

**VIDEO:** A New Approach – How the United Nations is responding to sexual exploitation and abuse

#### ***Four-track, victim-centred approach***

Based on four tracks, the approach documented in the report focuses on the rights and dignity of victims; ending impunity for those guilty of crimes and abuses; drawing on the wisdom and guidance of all those who have been affected, civil society, local communities and others to strengthen and improve UN's efforts; and to raise awareness and share best practices to end the vicious scourge.

The report also emphasizes the need to engage with UN Member States and calls for a high-level meeting on sexual exploitation and abuses in 2017 on the margins of the general debate of the 72nd session of the General Assembly.

The report further notes that the UN chief would seek Member States support to establish a system-wide consolidated confidential repository of case information to be placed under the supervision of the Special Coordinator on Improving UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

It also includes a detailed list of actions and recommendations, along with the relevant UN entity that would be responsible for consultation with relevant stakeholders, as well as provides data on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across the UN system and by non-UN international forces authorized by a Security Council mandate, covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2016.

***Peacekeeping initiatives in action***  
Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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## UN refugee agency issues renewed funding plea for Syria, as conflict enters seventh year

9 March 2017 – Unless drastic measures are taken to share up peace and security in Syria, the situation – which marks its sixth anniversary next week – will worsen, the United Nations refugee agency today said urging the international community to redouble its support for the 13.5 million people in need of aid.

Funding won't end the suffering. But it is one thing we can do as poverty and misery intensify. The resources currently available simply don't come close to meeting all the challenges, said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Funding won't end the suffering. But it is one thing we can do as poverty and misery intensify..

His message comes ahead of 15 and 16 March, when in 2011 authorities clamped down on demonstrations in Damascus, setting off protests calling for the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad.

Since then, nearly 6.3 million people were displaced and an additional 4.9 million people – mostly women and children – were forced to seek refuge, according to UN figures. Nearly 3 million Syrians under the age of five have grown up knowing nothing but conflict.

Ultimately, Syria's conflict isn't about numbers – it's about people, Grandi added. Families have been torn apart, innocent civilians killed, houses destroyed, businesses and livelihoods shattered. It's a collective failure.

One of those people is Wafaa Keyari, an eight-year-old girl from the battered Sakhour district of eastern Aleppo.

Living now in a temporary shelter on the outskirts of Aleppo, Wafaa was severely burned on her face and body when her house was shelled two years ago.

I was taken to hospital. I was awake and they treated me, Wafaa told UNHCR.

You know I was wearing wool clothes, like the ones I am wearing now, they got stuck to me. When they took me to the hospital, they were pulling them off my skin. It hurt so much, they didn't even use anaesthetic – they just pulled it off.

Asked whether the incident had changed her at all, she paused for a moment before replying with a smile: No. I am still the same nice girl.

In the shadow of the sad anniversary, the international community is

preparing for a conference in Brussels in early April to assess the country's future. The UN is seeking \$8 billion for this year to meet the needs of Syrians in the country and those living abroad.

According to UNHCR, the request follows commitments made at the 2016 London Conference, especially on education and livelihoods.

"Syria is at a crossroads," Mr. Grandi said. "Unless drastic measures are taken to shore up peace and security for Syria, the situation will worsen."