



# Public Health Communications

**How to Best Spread  
Information (Rather Than Diseases)**



**Melissa Loe**

**Communications Director**

**Carrie Williams**

**Media Relations Director**

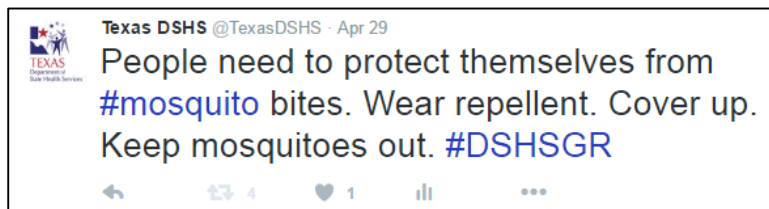
**Texas Department of State Health Services**

**@TexasDSHS**



# Why Good Communication?

- Signifies your capability
- Allows for info exchange
- Protects people, saves lives



# Diseases Spur Interest, Concern

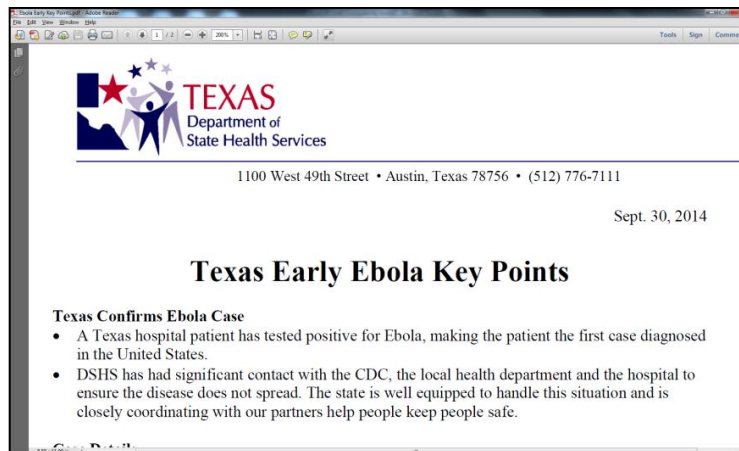
- Can be scary
- Affect kids, babies
- Sound exotic
- Emerging
- Surprising modes of transmission



# Core Standards

## Emerging Diseases

- Consistent messages
- Know your audience and level of concern
- Stay on top of evolving information
- Plan for key triggers, hard messages





# So Many Platforms

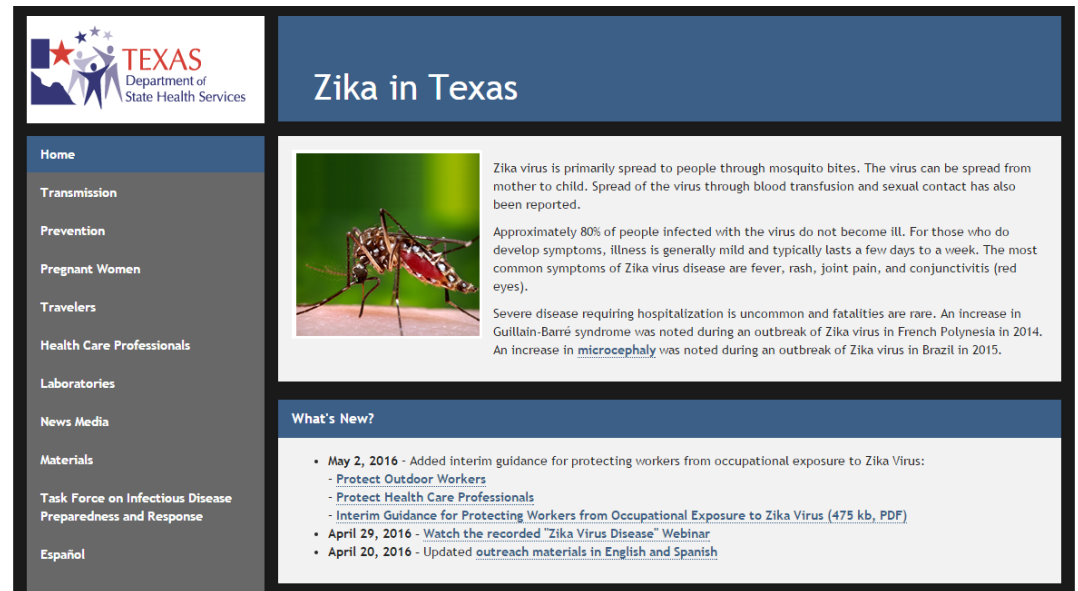
## News Media

- Reaches the masses
- 24/7 news cycle
- Tweeting, blogging reporters
- Driver of hard questions, issues
- Methods:
  - News releases, updates, statements, op-eds, response-to-inquiry, pitches, interviews
  - Tours, town halls, forums, meetings, webinars



# So Many Platforms

- Social Media
- Websites
- Advertising
- PSAs
- Materials
- Verbal
- Email



The screenshot shows a webpage from the Texas Department of State Health Services. The header includes the state logo and the text 'TEXAS Department of State Health Services'. The main title is 'Zika in Texas'. A navigation menu on the left lists: Home, Transmission, Prevention, Pregnant Women, Travelers, Health Care Professionals, Laboratories, News Media, Materials, Task Force on Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response, and Español. The main content area features a photograph of a mosquito and text explaining that Zika virus is primarily spread through mosquito bites. It notes that approximately 80% of infected people do not become ill, and common symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. It also mentions that severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon and that fatalities are rare. A 'What's New?' section lists updates from May 2, 2016, and April 29 and 20, 2016.

**TEXAS**  
Department of  
State Health Services

## Zika in Texas

Zika virus is primarily spread to people through mosquito bites. The virus can be spread from mother to child. Spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact has also been reported.

Approximately 80% of people infected with the virus do not become ill. For those who do develop symptoms, illness is generally mild and typically lasts a few days to a week. The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes).

Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon and fatalities are rare. An increase in Guillain-Barré syndrome was noted during an outbreak of Zika virus in French Polynesia in 2014. An increase in [microcephaly](#) was noted during an outbreak of Zika virus in Brazil in 2015.

### What's New?

- **May 2, 2016** - Added interim guidance for protecting workers from occupational exposure to Zika Virus:
  - [Protect Outdoor Workers](#)
  - [Protect Health Care Professionals](#)
  - [Interim Guidance for Protecting Workers from Occupational Exposure to Zika Virus \(475 kb, PDF\)](#)
- **April 29, 2016** - Watch the recorded "Zika Virus Disease" Webinar
- **April 20, 2016** - Updated outreach materials in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)

# Platforms Have to Work Together

- Identify a need and goal
- Craft your message
- Channel: go to your audience
- Evaluate



Texas DSHS @TexasDSHS · Apr 29

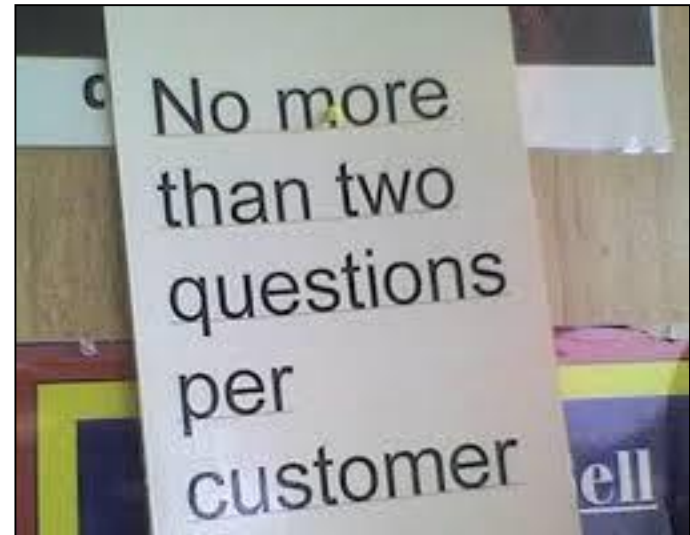
Hellerstedt: I really hope people will take actions in their own communities to prevent mosquito breeding. #DSHSGR #Zika





# Elements of Good Communication

- Clear, concise
- Fast, responsive
- Complete/context
- Trust, human error
- Relationships
- Honesty



# Ebola Vs. Zika

## Chief Differences

- Disease differences
- Ebola was a surprise for Texas

## What We Know

- Potential public health emergency
- A single case could have major impact
- Our mission: prevent spread

## Key Challenges

- Scary disease, wrong info, rumors
- Multiple jurisdictions
- Difficult messages
  - How safe is safe enough?



## Texas Town Quarantined After Family Of Five Test Positive For The Ebola Virus

Posted about 1 day ago · 21 comments



The small town of Purdon, Texas has been quarantined after a family of five tested positive for the Ebola virus.

Purdon is located just 70 miles from Dallas, Texas, and is a small town with a population of about 100. The family, consisting of Mr. Phillips, Mrs. Phillips, and their three children, were quarantined for both American Ebola and the West African Ebola virus. The family is from Duncan, and Texas native, Nina Phillips.

It has been verified that Jack Phillips returned from Dallas last week while on business. Shortly after arriving home, Mr. Phillips began exhibiting flu-like symptoms, but did not immediately go to the hospital. At this time his wife and

children began showing similar symptoms, which provoked the family to get tested. Doctors then learned that Phillips, his wife, and three children had contracted Ebola hemorrhagic fever.

# Our Strategies

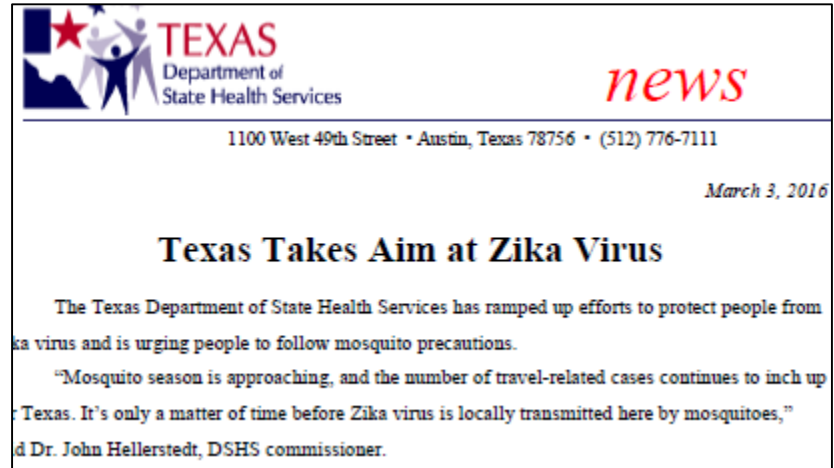
- Absolute candor
- Simple messages
- Find and use the data
- Reach big audiences
- Quickly recognize crisis
- Remember core mission
- Err on the spectrum of doing/saying more
- Promote milestones, power of good news
- Public health works



# Texas Takes on Zika

## Outlook and Efforts

- Story of summer?
- Key triggers
- News media
- Community outreach
- Webinars
- Local/CDC PIOs



**TEXAS**  
Department of  
State Health Services

*news*

1100 West 49th Street • Austin, Texas 78756 • (512) 776-7111

March 3, 2016

### Texas Takes Aim at Zika Virus

The Texas Department of State Health Services has ramped up efforts to protect people from Zika virus and is urging people to follow mosquito precautions.

“Mosquito season is approaching, and the number of travel-related cases continues to inch up in Texas. It’s only a matter of time before Zika virus is locally transmitted here by mosquitoes,” said Dr. John Hellerstedt, DSHS commissioner.

### With a steep learning curve, authorities focus Zika comms on pregnant women

April 22, 2016 by Alison Kanski | Be the first to comment

Public health officials are learning more about Zika every day and working feverishly to develop a vaccine. In the meantime, they're targeting preventative communications at pregnant women.


News Analysis




The focus of the CDC's Zika communications is women

# Texas Takes on Zika

- TexasZika.org
- Social media
- Campaign

 **Texas Department of State Health Services**  
April 21 at 4:48pm · 🌐

April showers bring May flowers, and the possibility of mosquitoes. If your area has been hit by the recent rain, be sure to prevent mosquito breeding and bites by draining any standing water around your home that may have been left behind. #DumpAndDrain #FightTheBite



**Zika in Texas**

Zika virus is primarily spread to people through mosquito bites. Your best protection to avoid infection is to prevent mosquito breeding and protect yourself from mosquito bites.

TEXASZIKA.ORG

🔗 Share

Abraham Garcia, Sandra Alfaro, Mathew Cyriac and 4 others like this.

2 shares

## Zika: What To Know Before You Travel



**What we know about Zika**

- \*Zika is primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.
- \*Most cases of Zika in Texas are related to travel abroad to places where Zika is being spread.
- \*Zika can be spread through sexual transmission and blood transfusions.
- \*It is possible for a pregnant mother infected with Zika to pass the virus to her baby. The virus has been linked to birth defects.
- \*There have not been any reports of pets or other kinds of animals spreading or contracting Zika.
- \*There is currently no vaccine or treatment for Zika.
- \*During the first week of infection, Zika can be found in the blood and passed from an infected person to a mosquito when it bites. The infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people.

**Prevent Zika while traveling**

\*The best way to avoid infection is to protect yourself from mosquito bites:

- Cover up with long sleeves and pants.
- Wear an EPA-approved insect repellent when outdoors.
- Keep mosquitoes out with air conditioning and intact window screens, if available.

\*If possible, pregnant mothers should delay travel to areas where Zika is spreading or talk to their doctors first to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.

\*Pregnant mothers and their male partners who travel to places where Zika is spreading should follow the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidance to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika found at [www.texaszika.org/prevention.htm](http://www.texaszika.org/prevention.htm).

\*Stay informed about travel information and precautions. For a current list of areas with Zika outbreaks, visit [www.texaszika.org/travelers.htm](http://www.texaszika.org/travelers.htm).

**Symptoms of Zika**

About 4 out of 5 people with Zika won't even know they have it. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week.

Even if you don't know you're infected, mosquitoes that bite you could transmit the virus to others.

The most common symptoms of Zika are:

- \*Fever
- \*Rash
- \*Joint Pain
- \*Conjunctivitis (red eyes)



Images: CDC

**Prevent Zika when you return**

\*To help prevent others from getting sick, people who travel to places where Zika is being spread should:

- Protect themselves from mosquito bites while abroad and for seven days after returning home.
- Eliminate mosquito breeding sites around their homes: remove standing water, get rid of containers that hold water, and cover trash containers.
- Follow the CDC's recommendations to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika.

\*People who experience symptoms of Zika should contact their doctor.

 **TEXAS** Department of State Health Services

TexasZika.org  
03/2016

# Key Takeaways

- Methods and platforms must be coordinated
- Communicate about Zika – or any infectious disease – as early as possible
- Amplify Texas Zika messages
- Questions?