The Zika virus in Central and South America and the Caribbean seems to be connected to an astoundingly high number of babies in Brazil being born with microcephaly, a congenital brain defect that causes under development of head and brain size. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a travel warning for 22 locations as of Jan. 22, 2016. The CDC especially recommends that pregnant women or women trying to become pregnant reconsider travel. All known cases of Zika in the U.S. have been linked to travel, including the birth of a child with microcephaly in Hawaii to a mother infected with Zika in Brazil during her pregnancy.

The Zika virus causes flu-like symptoms for about 20 percent of those infected. The other 80 percent experience no symptoms.

The public health community points out that the mosquitoes that carry the Zika virus also carry other tropical diseases and that U.S. vector control programs largely have prevented large outbreaks of dengue fever, chikungunya or yellow fever, although there has been a recent outbreak of dengue fever on the big island in Hawaii. These mosquitoes are present in the U.S. The public health community will continue to gather facts and develop testing and treatment protocols for the Zika virus just as it did for Ebola after the scare in 2014.

CSG has prepared this primer for public leaders with up-to-date information.