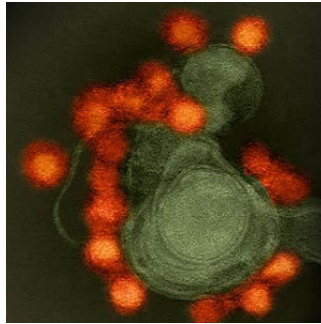# Rapid Use of EHR Data Important in Preventing Zika Spread

In the U.S., health authorities are relying heavily on information technology to help prevent the spread of Zika virus. For example, efforts are underway to develop resources that will support rapid deployment of critical information through EHRs and other clinical software in the battle against Zika.

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT are also coordinating several activities including developing algorithms, standardising vocabulary sets, incorporating Zika order sets into HIT products, as well as reaching out to EHR vendors.

"We are really dealing with computer science vs. the biological sciences," said Daniel Chaput, an ONC public health analyst, during an education session at the HIMSS17 conference in Orlando. "Never before in history has there been a situation where a bite from a mosquito can result in a devastating malformation."

The mosquito-borne Zika virus has been linked to the birth defect microcephaly. A pregnant mother can pass it to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. The virus can also be sexually transmitted. As of 7 February, more than 1,450 pregnant women in the United States have been identified with laboratory evidence of Zika virus infection, with more than 3,150 such cases in the U.S. territories, according to the CDC.

There may be lessons learned from the public health response to infectious diseases like Ebola, but those things do not easily translate to combating the current Zika crisis. "From an IT perspective, it was simpler with Ebola, even though the disease is much more acute," according to Floyd Eisenberg, MD, president of iParsimony. with Zika virus, identifying risk is more difficult as there are a lot of things to consider: where someone was, when they were there, what tests need to be done, as well as what they should do to avoid pregnancy or — if they are already pregnant — to manage pregnancy.

Sanjeev Tandon, MD, lead for CDC's EHR Meaningful Use & Public Health Project and the CDC Zika Response Health IT Team, said that "as we start to go into the mosquito-breeding season in the next few months, CDC will be keeping a watch" over the emerging situation from its Emergency Operations Center, which is actively monitoring and coordinating the federal government's response to the U.S. outbreak.

"We receive the clinical guidance from CDC that comes out of the Emergency Operations Center, and we transform that guidance for EHR to develop decision support to implement those rules consistently," Dr. Chaput explained.

Source: Health Data Management
Image Credit: NIAID

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