

IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

MHPSS AND ZIKA VIRUS
February 11, 2016
15:30 - 16:30 CET (GMT+1)

Description: The Reference Group met to discuss the work of our agencies on MHPSS in the response to Zika and share any documents or needs assessments and ideas on how we can collaborate.

AGENDA

I. Introduction and roll call

Carmen Martinez - MSF; Saji Thomas - UNICEF; Julian Eaton - CBM; Mark Van Ommeren - WHO; Tarun Dua - WHO; Charles Ham - Hope Worldwide; Marcio Gagliato - MHPSS.net; Nana Wiedemann - IFRC; Lina Villa - IFRC; Louise Juul Hansen - IFRC; Sarah Harrison; Louise Vinther-Larsen - IFRC; Silvia Campo - UN Medical Services Division

II. Overview: Brief description of the Zika virus and summary of current situation

- A causal relationship between Zika infection during pregnancy and microcephaly is strongly suspected (not yet scientifically proven)
- There might also be a connection between Zika and other neurological issues (not yet scientifically proven)
- Important to facilitate Psychosocial support (PSS) to families with babies with neurological disorders and support to women who are or want to get pregnant
- Pillars to the response: care, research, risk communication and community engagement

III. MHPSS needs round: Two minutes per organization on discussed/observed MHPSS needs.

- There is an increasing need of strengthening psychological support. An example is the suffering clearly perceived in the poorest areas in northeast Brazil where

there are cases reported of women being left by their partners or losing their jobs when they are informed about the microcephaly diagnosis, or just when they have Zika virus when pregnant

- Need to offer adequate messaging around protection that does not lead to fear or erroneous information
- Government campaigns in Latin America might not get adequate attention due to mistrust
- Vulnerable groups (WHO): Women in reproductive age, pregnant mothers, newborns with neurological disorders and their families

IV. Response round: Two minutes per organization on work being carried out in the affected countries as well as any plans

MSF - Currently focus on epidemiological surveillance in South America

UNICEF - Regional response plan which includes water and sanitation, health, protection and PSS for parents and caregivers. UNICEF is working with governments on issues of communication and advocacy.

WHO/PAHO - In the process of preparing a PSS guidance for healthcare workers and Zika Virus. Participants will give a time frame of 48 hours for peer revisions. WHO is interested in working with agencies in monitoring children born with neurological disorders.

Brazil¹ - Persons that have received the microcephaly diagnoses have access to mental health professionals, through the Support Center for Family Health (NASF - Núcleo de Apoio à Saúde da Família) or other mental health professionals in the municipality. Severe cases, requiring specialized care, should be sent to the Centers for Psychosocial Care (CAPS - Centros de Atenção Psicossocial) or any other reference mental health services of the municipality or region. There is no information on what kind of MHPSS support is being provided, neither if the service is facilitated.

The information received so far is that there is no current official coordination mechanism set-up for MHPSS and Zika virus in Brazil, but it is currently under consideration by MoH

MHPSS.net - Has started a dedicated group on mhps.net to facilitate the sharing of resources, including latest information and materials relevant to MHPSS and Zika Virus

¹ Information provided by Marcio Gagliato, Brazilian psychologist and currently based in Brazil.

Emergency response. The group is currently being moderated together with IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support.

All agencies are strongly encouraged to join the group and share any relevant material or activity. Resources can also be sent to marcio@mhpss.net to be uploaded. The direct link to the group is <http://mhpss.net/new-group-zika-microcephaly-emergency-response-2016-join-now/>

CBM - Working on reinforcing networks of partners and communities in supporting affected families

IFRC- An appeal was issued last week, and a PSS position was included in the appeal. The appeal includes an objective on supporting the assessment of PSS needs in the affected communities and design, develop and monitor a psychosocial support strategy integrated to the appeal plan of action which will probably include: safe places to give PSS first aid and provide coping tools to most vulnerable communities, strengthen social networks, identify cases that needs referral, diminish fear, prevent stigma and strengthen community engagement. IFRC plans to work on increasing the sense of comfort in communities and support to families.

V. Suggestions on opportunities for collaboration

- Use the strength of the network to transmit balanced and adequate messages.
- Write an advocacy briefing on Zika and PFA or MHPSS in EN, SP and PT
 - It needs to be clarified who would lead this task and we will try to clarify it before the next meeting. If someone volunteers to start the work please let us know so we can coordinate

VI. Next steps

Liaise with Global Health Cluster to find out whether they are planning to release an advocacy brief and if yes, how can we add information on Zika and MHPSS. This will be led by Co-Chair Support.

Organize another telephone conference in two weeks in order to take stock on the work of each organization and start collaborating on the policy brief.

- Proposed date: March 3rd at 15:30.

Comment on WHO PSS guidance for healthcare workers and Zika Virus (due Monday 15 February)

Join the MHPSS Zika - Microcephaly, Emergency Response, 2016 group for finding and posting information

VII. Any other comments