Highlights

- In line with WHO recommendations, the MoH changed the criteria for classifying suspected cases of microcephaly. Boys with cephalic perimeter equal or under 31.9 cm and girls with cephalic perimeter equal or under 31.5 cm born after 37 weeks will be considered cases of suspected microcephaly.

- From March 07 to March 10, government mobilized 78,000 schools in 4,787 municipalities with vector control initiatives. The “Health at School week” is happening under the federal program “Health at Schools” involving 18 million people. According to the MoH, approximately US$20 million will be available for the implementation of the program throughout the year.
Situation Overview

Brazilian Ministry of Health’s numbers shows there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of microcephaly, related to the ZIKV among newborns in Brazil starting in October 2015 mainly in the northeast region. The Federal Government of Brazil has identified this issue as a priority, and President Dilma Rousseff launched a national plan of action to combat this virus in December 2015. Various ministries, governmental organizations including the police, army, firefighters and others, have been mobilized under the leadership of the Ministry of Health to support various activities related to prevention, communication, monitoring, capacity building, among others. UNICEF Brazil (BCO), in an effort to provide support and in response to a request for assistance, has developed a proposal to support governmental efforts to address the epidemic. The action plan is based mainly on vector control using the existing network with the Brazilian municipalities.

Brazilian government response

According to the MoH, 48.2 million properties (71.97% of the total goal of 67 million) were visited by health and/or military personnel. Over 93% of all target municipalities have already started local cleaning initiatives. Brazilian research institutions continue the efforts for developing rapid tests and also new strategies for reducing mosquitos breeding grounds and their proliferation rates. On 09 March, MoH announced a modification for the criteria to identify suspected cases of microcephaly. Brazil will now use the most recent protocol indicated by WHO which considers suspect cases: for newborns (over 37 weeks) boys with cephalic perimeter equal or under 31.9cm; and girls with cephalic perimeter equal or under 31.5 cm. For premature babies, InterGrowth curve will be used. Government is distributing over 3.2 million booklets for pregnant women countrywide with guidance on the prenatal and birth assistance and care. In this new edition, there are specific orientations for protection and prevention against Aedes aegypti.

BCO’s Programme Response

Coordination

A key focus of UNICEF’s action in Brazil is vector control, by joining forces with communities across the country to eliminate breeding grounds of the Aedes aegypti. UNICEF is conducting activities in close collaboration with the Ministries of Health (MoH) and of Education (MoE) as well as with PAHO, state and municipal governments to reach affected communities with the knowledge on how to reduce mosquito infection. UNICEF is also in continuous liaison with LACRO and HQ in coordinating efforts to enhance regional efforts and impacts. Google is now a key partner working to leverage the response plan in Brazil with innovative technologies and the support to capacity building and engagement initiatives focused on priority regions in Brazil.

Strategy

The BCO strategy is based on supporting government-led national plans and inter-agency priorities to reduce the number of breeding grounds. BCO is using three main strategies in the ZIKV response plan: Advocacy, Communications for Development and Monitoring. BCO’s priorities are to reach the most vulnerable communities and strengthen prevention and protection initiatives. BCO’s unique capillarity in Brazilian municipalities is a key component of our strategy. UNICEF is present in 84% of the municipalities classified at high-risk of mosquito infection so far. Therefore, BCO’s role is centered in articulating among different government levels and engaging Brazilian civil society to breeding grounds.

Advocacy and Mobilization

Capacity building rounds in Amazonas state progressed. Under the scope of the project “Palavra da Criança”, 30 personnel from education secretariats of 13 municipalities were trained as brigades for reducing Aedes aegypti breeding grounds. Training was provided by the Foundation for Health Surveillance. These brigades replicate the knowledge and techniques on reducing breeding grounds in their municipalities. As already occurred for many municipalities in the semiarid region under UNICEF’s Seal Platform, upcoming trainings for over 360 municipalities in Amazonian region are planned. A special online training module on vector control and microcephaly will be soon available at the existing virtual platform for Amazonian municipalities. The course targets 600 municipal personnel who are already being trained in public policy management by UNICEF.
Communications and C4D

As part of the UNICEF Action Plan, UNICEF will conduct focus groups research in two municipalities in the Northeast: Campina Grande (state of Paraiba) and Recife (Pernambuco). Both locations experience high incidence of breeding grounds of the Aedes aegypti mosquito, as well as high incidence of cases of microcephaly. Discussions will be conducted with public managers, community health agents and vector control agents, pregnant women and women in reproductive age as well as adolescents. The findings of this research will help fine tune the messaging UNICEF is disseminating to the public, and inform the community engagement initiatives promoted through UNICEF Seal of Approval in over 1,297 municipalities in the Semiard and the Amazon.

Google.org announced a $1 million grant to UNICEF to help fight Zika on the ground in Brazil, and the wider Latin American region. UNICEF Brazil CO will receive USD 400,000 that will be used to raise widespread awareness of the issue and prevention methods, reduce mosquito populations and work with communities and governments to prevent Zika transmission. In addition to the financial support, Google engineers and data scientists will help UNICEF build an open source platform to visualize the risk of Zika transmission for different geographical regions, and ultimately help inform UNICEF, governments and NGO’s how best to focus their time and resources in the fight against the virus. The partnership announcement was widely covered by the Brazilian and International press.

As part of the Google partnership, UNICEF joined Dr. Drauzio Varella, a Brazilian physician and the infectologist Esper Kallá, in a Google Hangout to answer participants’ questions about Zika virus and the fight against Aedes aegypti. Dr. Varella, a very popular media personality in Brazil, regularly appears on TV talking about health issues. His Youtube channel has over 183,000 followers. More than 25,000 people participated in the event; over 2,000 questions and comments were submitted in advance. Representing UNICEF, Dr. Francisca Andrade, pediatrician and a Program Specialist participated of the hangout and answered several questions about UNICEF’s response to the epidemic.

Monitoring

The BCO response strategy includes an M&E pillar, which focuses on four areas: i) situation monitoring (evolving and potentially shifting trends in the epidemic, and in the spread of Aedes aegypti in the country); response monitoring (progress on Brazil’s response to the crisis, including UNICEF’s activities and added value); research (innovative research to generate data and evidence to support prevention and response efforts); and knowledge management (documentation and systematization of real-time information and data, as well as progress and results achieved by the response strategy). So far, this component has produced a series of bi-weekly SitReps, several maps for data visualization, methodological technical notes and sampling strategy proposals for research that will start in March.

Next SitRep: 16/03/2016

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