

Success
story

Caribbean Zika Prevention and Response Project

Psst! Have you heard? Listening to rumors can help fight Zika Guyana Red Cross



When Guyana Red Cross volunteers like Teddy Sukhdeo go out into their communities they listen to community members concerns and note down any rumors they hear about Zika.

In the early days of the Zika outbreak, Andrea Phillips, coordinator of the Guyana Red Cross Zika Project, and her team of volunteers at Guyana Red Cross realized they had a challenge. Zika, a mosquito-borne and sexually transmitted virus was getting a lot of global attention and scientists were scrambling to learn more about the virus and the risks it posed to unborn infants.

Zika was previously unknown in Guyana and Andrea and her team were quick to get essential messages out to communities. Decreasing the risks for being bitten by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that spreads the virus and decreasing the risk of transmission to pregnant women were key. But they were hearing questions from communities that did not align with facts: people were asking whether Zika was made in a lab on purpose, whether it was really spread by mosquitoes, and whether it was just a method of population control.

The Guyana Red Cross team would be collecting data on where they were working, who they would reach and what messages they would be giving; but this other kind of feedback they were hearing seemed too important to ignore. “If people believed these rumors they might not take action to protect themselves and their communities.” says Andrea.

Before starting household visits Andrea briefed her team of volunteers on the importance of capturing this feedback. She explained that, “Even when the information is wrong, I need to understand the



When Andrea Phillips noticed people were spreading misinformation about Zika she decided to keep a database of rumors to help her and the Guyana Red Cross volunteers better respond to the risk of Zika.

rumors that are spreading so I can make sure our volunteers are equipped to respond and I can develop messages to combat these rumors.”

At the end of every day of household visits Andrea debriefs the volunteers on what they heard and how they responded. The next day, before they return to the field she briefs them on what rumors to be ready for and address through improved messaging. Andrea documents the rumors in a simple spreadsheet, recording when and where they were heard. She uses this spreadsheet to make sure Guyana Red Cross messages are addressing community concerns and combatting misinformation.

“We work closely with communities and they are the experts, so we don’t just want to tell them what to do. Every time

we are in communities we are there to have a conversation, we are there to both share and listen” explains Andrea.

The work that Andrea has pioneered in Guyana will help them to respond to future health threats and disease outbreaks and is supported by USAID through IFRC’s Caribbean Zika Prevention and Response Project. The experience of Guyana Red Cross was used in the development of a brief regional guide on rumor management “Rumours: Listen, Verify, Engage!”. The guide is based on the CDAC Network rumor guide “Rumour has it: a practice guide to working with rumours” and helps 13 countries in the Caribbean in their response to the Zika outbreak.



Guyana Red Cross volunteers are better prepared to inform people about Zika and respond to their questions and concerns after listening more carefully to misinformation about the disease.



For more information:

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