



# World Health Organization

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refer to:

Your reference:

The Honourable Senator Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senate  
Suite SH-506  
Hart Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
United States of America

Geneva, 1 June 2016

Dear Senator Shaheen,

Thank you for your letter of 17 May sharing your concerns that the Olympic Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro could contribute to further spread of Zika virus disease. I enjoyed meeting you in Washington, DC earlier this year and deeply appreciate your thoughtful and well-informed views.

Since I declared the Zika outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, WHO has convened hundreds of international experts to assess risks and develop technical guidance, which we update as evidence evolves. Our principal aim is to protect people from infection and thus reduce the risk of serious neurological complications, including microcephaly in newborns and Guillain-Barré syndrome in older age groups. The Zika Emergency Committee, convened under the International Health Regulations and chaired by Dr David Heymann, is a formal instrument that I personally draw upon for high-level advice.

To date, WHO has deployed senior epidemiologists to Brazil on four separate occasions to gather first-hand data on the current situation and assess the level of risk to the large number of athletes and spectators expected to attend the Olympic Summer Games. The most recent assessment took place during the first two weeks of May.

Given the current level of international concern, I have decided to ask members of the Zika Emergency Committee to examine the risks of holding the Olympic Summer Games as currently scheduled. The experts, well-versed in travel medicine, the epidemiology of vector-borne diseases, seasonal patterns of mosquito-borne infections, and risk communications, will meet shortly. Their advice to me will be immediately made public on our web site, together with the names and affiliations of the experts.

Again, I deeply appreciate the concerns expressed in your letter, which go beyond the immediate threat to the United States to consider what further international spread of the Zika virus could mean for the world.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Margaret Chan  
Director-General

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