



Pesticide Action Network International's Statement on Global Zika Outbreaks

April 14, 2016

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International is saddened by and concerned about the outbreaks of the mosquito-borne illness, zika, and its possible link with microcephaly (babies born with reduced head circumference and associated brain development issues). We stand in solidarity with the families and children who are affected by microcephaly, and we join the call for national and international support for impacted families — and rigorous research to help reduce the rates of microcephaly.

There is much debate and speculation about the links between zika and microcephaly, and the links between exposure to larvicides used in mosquito control and increased incidents of this devastating birth defect. While scientists work to conclusively determine the causes of microcephaly, PAN International supports a precautionary approach to mosquito control.

We firmly believe that community-based preventative measures for mosquito control are the best way forward. We call for using mosquito control methods through Integrated Vector Management (IVM) that do not rely on toxic pesticides. We also call for a holistic approach that considers the socio-environmental conditions of the transmission of any vector-borne disease and that requires the improvement of sanitary conditions in vulnerable poor populations. Adequate and consistent entomological and epidemiological surveillance of the vector population and the disease are also essential. We also strongly call for international support for more research and original fieldwork to help establish whether or not there is a link between zika, or the implicated larvicides, and microcephaly.

The first line of defense against any vector-borne disease has to be community-based vector control methods that avoid the use of highly hazardous pesticides whenever possible. These methods, as outlined by the World Health Organization, include environmental modification and manipulation to eliminate mosquito breeding sites, better house screening to protect inhabitants from mosquitoes, prevention of mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeve protective clothing, use of safe mosquito repellents and the use of bednets. This community-based IVM approach has proved to be very effective across the globe in controlling mosquito-borne diseases ranging from malaria to dengue to chikungunya.



In the face of increased zika outbreaks, some are calling for a resurgence in the use of dangerous pesticides like DDT to control mosquito populations. We strongly caution against the use of such pesticides. The science on DDT is irrefutable, with many studies showing its severe long-term impacts on human health and the environment.

Furthermore, DDT and other highly hazardous pesticides used for malaria control have been shown to be [ineffective](#)¹ in the long run, as mosquitoes develop resistance to them. Communities that are facing the burden of microcephaly do not need to face the unnecessary added health burden from exposure to highly hazardous, and ultimately ineffective, pesticides. We urge decision makers in impacted countries to use proven, non-toxic methods to manage mosquitoes and protect the health of their communities.

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Notes:

¹ www.pan-germany.org/gbr/project_work/malaria_control_without_ddt.html