On 14 June 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) will convene the 3rd meeting of the Emergency Committee under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) on Zika and observed increase in neurological disorders and neonatal malformations.

The Committee will consider whether the Zika virus and related complications still constitute a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, review the implementation and impact of earlier recommendations made by the Committee, and determine if new recommendations are needed or existing recommendations require revision.

During the meeting, members of the Emergency Committee will be presented with updates from a number of countries most affected by Zika virus and/or its complications, including information about disease spread, impact of interventions, and rate and scope of complications. They will also review new and updated research and reports on the virus and associated complications (microcephaly and other congenital malformations and neurological effects), as well as progress in related research.

The Committee will review information from technical experts and research on the risk of spread of mosquito-borne diseases, and particularly Zika virus, through international travel and mass gatherings, including the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The Committee will be presented with updates from Brazil on the current status of Zika virus in the country, trends in transmission over time, and the nature and impact of the country's steps to prevent infections and promote vector control, and other interventions to protect residents and travellers.

Background

WHO Emergency Committees are convened under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR). The IHR address the exponential increase in international travel and trade, and emergence and re-emergence of international disease threats and other health risks. Their purpose and scope are "to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade."This binding instrument of international law entered into force on 15 June 2007, following adoption by the World Health Assembly on 23 May, 2005. There are currently 196 States Parties to the IHR, including every Member State of the World Health Organization.

Based on the recommendations of the first meeting of the Emergency Committee, on 1 February 2016, WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern for the cluster of microcephaly cases and other neurological disorders associated with Zika virus. As mandated by the IHR, once an outbreak or other health event is judged to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and temporary recommendations are issued under IHR, the Emergency Committee must convene at least once every three months to consider its recommendations to the Director-General, until the

emergency is declared to be over. The last meeting of this Emergency Committee occurred on 8 March 2016.

For reports and recommendations from previous meetings of the Emergency Committee and other related information see: http://www.who.int/ihr/procedures/ihr_committees/en/

Under IHR, the deliberations of the Emergency Committee are conducted by independent public health experts from a range of backgrounds and geographies. Committee members are drawn from the IHR Experts Roster established by the Director-General under Article 47 of IHR (2005). The roster is composed of international experts in such fields as disease control, virology, vaccine development, risk communication, bioethics, vector control, mass gatherings, and infectious disease epidemiology. Each Emergency Committee includes experts in relevant fields of expertise to the emergency under consideration. The members and advisors of the Emergency Committee related to Zika virus and its complications are listed with their areas of expertise at http://www.who.int/ihr/procedures/zika-ec-members/en/

Under the terms of IHR, the deliberations of the Emergency Committee sessions are confidential to encourage full reports from countries on the spread of disease, associated risks and ongoing interventions, and to promote frankness and dialogue among members as they formulate their recommendations. Some of the background material considered by the Emergency Committee includes preliminary reports and assessments that countries or relevant experts have not cleared for public dissemination or publication, but are important for up-to-date, informed expert deliberation. Following the meeting the views of the Emergency Committee are communicated to all States Parties and the general public.

All advisors and members of the Committee must declare interests that WHO then reviews for potential conflict of interest related to the topic of the Emergency Committee. In addition, participants sign a confidentiality form. These precautions protect the objectivity and neutrality of committees convened under the IHR and are consistent with the provision of IHR itself.

A summary of the Emergency Committee's deliberations and recommendations will be posted soon after the meeting at: http://www.who.int/ihr/emergency-committee-zika/en/