June 13, 2016
City of Austin and Williamson County Public Health Officials to Conduct CASPER Survey

Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (A/TCHHSD) and Williamson County and Cities Health District (WCCHD) are collaborating on a first-of-its-kind, simultaneous public health project to learn more about the public’s understanding of the Zika virus and how best to communicate information that helps protect residents of both communities. Zika is a generally mild illness primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. Zika is currently widespread in Central and South America and the Caribbean, and is linked to serious birth defects. There have been two travel-related cases of Zika in Travis County, and one travel-related case in Williamson County to date.

This project, called a Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response, or CASPER, is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey tool. Its purpose is to gather public health and emergency preparedness feedback from members of a community through interviewing randomly selected households.

On Friday, June 17 and Saturday, June 18, A/TCHHSD and WCCHD public health teams will travel to neighborhoods across Travis County and Williamson County to conduct door-to-door surveys to ask residents about their knowledge of mosquito-borne diseases, mosquito prevention, and household emergency preparedness. The information from the surveys will be used for future public health, emergency communications and planning efforts for the Central Texas region.

CASPER survey team members will include: epidemiologists, public health and emergency response personnel, and public health students. The survey will not be used to collect any personal health information, and will only be conducted during daylight hours. Participation in the survey is voluntary and residents may decline to participate if approached by interviewers. All CASPER volunteers will be wearing clearly marked vests and will have identification cards.

By conducting surveys in two counties, A/TCHHSD and WCCHD hope to gain a real-time regional perspective on the public health needs of each community. Information on Zika can be found at www.austintexas.gov/zika and at www.@wcchd.org

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