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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE

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'Explosive' Chikungunya Virus Likely To Spread; Reminder of Critical Research Needs

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene's American Committee on Arthropod-Borne Viruses (ACAV) released the following statement based on [a document prepared regarding the introduction of Chikungunya virus into the Caribbean](#):

December 30, 2013—Recent reports of what is believed to be the first-ever local transmission of Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) in the Caribbean edges the Western Hemisphere closer to the possibility of an explosive outbreak of this mosquito-transmitted disease.

The virus has a record of spreading rapidly – a 2004 outbreak on Kenya's Lamu Island sickened approximately 75 percent of the local population. Based on its rapid dissemination throughout the Indian Ocean region and into other parts of the world, CHIKV is likely to take root in the tropical Americas, further burdening people, health systems and already-strained economies.

CHIKV results in painful, debilitating symptoms, including severe arthritis and swelling of the tissues surrounding the joints. Treatment can be costly; in some cases, infected individuals have required hospitalization for a week. Many patients are incapacitated for several weeks – sometimes months – with severe joint pain.

Several other arthropod-borne viruses of public health significance are present in the Americas, including dengue virus, West Nile virus, Eastern Equine encephalitis virus, Powassan virus and Heartland virus.

CHIKV's emergence in the Western Hemisphere serves as an important reminder of the ability of these viruses to spread and emerge in new areas, and that the U.S. government and other donors must sufficiently support tropical medicine research, including research on neglected and understudied arboviruses.

The U.S. is currently poorly positioned to respond to new and existing arboviral threats. Moreover, given the increasing number of cases and worsening outlook for control of most arboviruses, it is critical that the U.S. maintain a vigorous research program in order to train and maintain a cadre of scientists and public health workers with the expertise and insight to respond to new threats in an integrated and cooperative manner. ASTMH is actively making the case for adequate research funding for these and other tropical medicine concerns.

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About the American Committee on Arthropod-Borne Viruses (ACAV)

A subgroup within ASTMH, ACAV provides a forum for the exchange of scientific information among people interested in the study, prevention and treatment of arboviruses. Arbovirus research focuses on viruses transmitted by arthropods (mainly ticks and mosquitoes).

About the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

ASTMH, founded in 1903, is a worldwide organization of scientists, clinicians and program professionals whose mission is to promote global health through the prevention and control of infectious and other diseases that disproportionately afflict the global poor.