

Infectious Disease: Coverage in Real Time

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Agenda

- How journalists may decide traditional vs. digital media
- How news is covered (quickly) during an outbreak
- When misinformation goes viral on social media
- What you can do

Breaking News

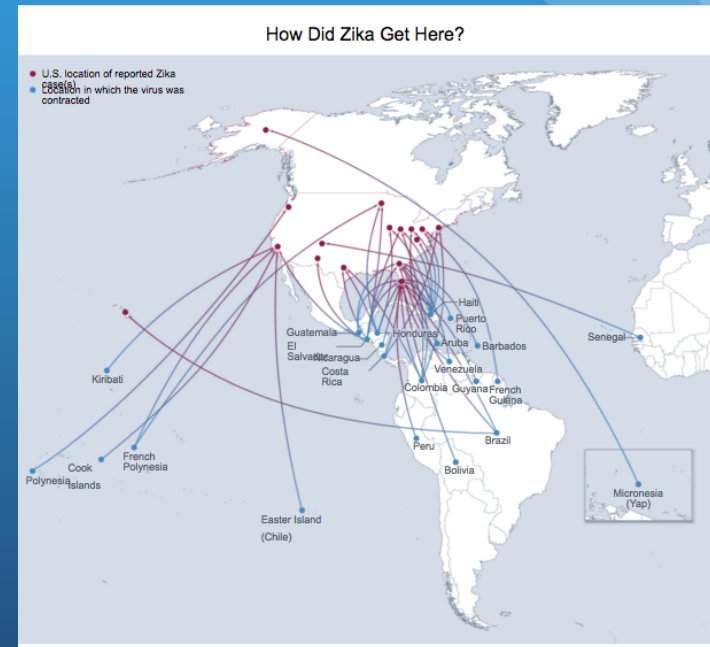
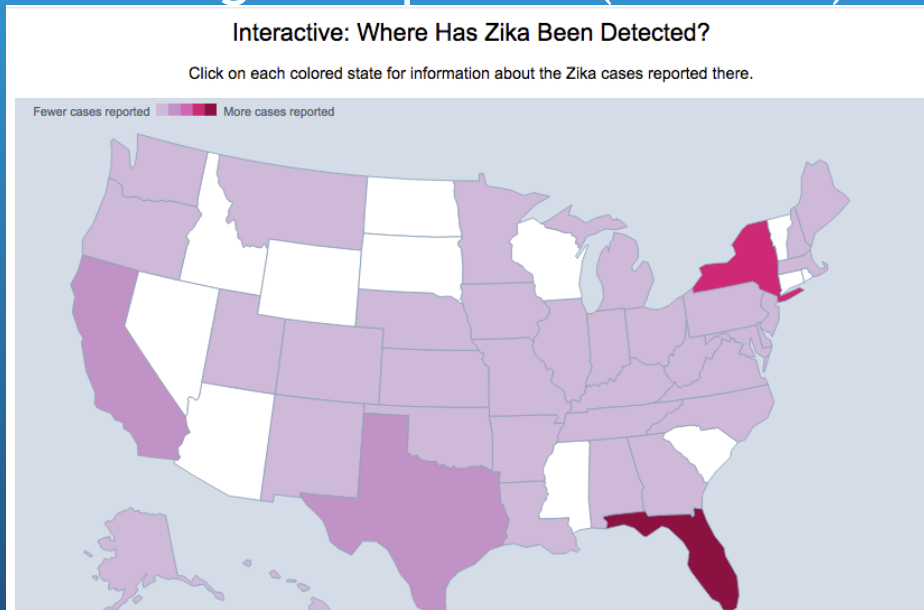
An outbreak of an infectious disease: what do (journalists) do?

Print vs. Web

- Who are you trying to reach?
- Story (context, humanize)
- Q&A (fast facts)
- Graphic
- Podcast
- Video

Zika: When information is not available

- Zika: Why I called state health depts. and provided regular updates (Jan. '16)



<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/zika-virus-threatens-u-s-from-abroad1/>

Where do infectious disease stories come from?

- Researcher or physician
- Health department or agency
- Advocacy group
- Maybe crowdsourcing
- Goal: get out the facts, dispel rumors, raise awareness, humanize the problem(s)

Social Media Changing the landscape, requires response

- Fast-paced information
 - No more one-dimensional communication with bulletin sent out to doctors/patients (in disaster or with disease)
 - Following the Boston Marathon bombings, 1/4 of Americans reportedly looked to Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites for information, according to The Pew Research Center
- PROS AND CONS
 - Viral twitter or Facebook message can alert media to a story/area of interest
 - Can also fuel public problems if information is inaccurate/public health officials are not able to react quickly to halt spread of misinformation...

When tweet goes viral

- August 7, 2014 tweet
 - In Nigeria, an undergrad student tweeted that the Ministry of Health is urging public to prevent Ebola attack by drinking and bathing in salt water
- “Please ensure that you and your family and all your neighbours bath with hot water and salt before daybreak today because of Ebola virus which is spreading through the air” also separate tweet about drinking salt water
 - <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/nigerian-ebola-hoax-results-deaths/story?id=25842191>

Bad news

- On Aug. 8, the Nigerian newspaper Vanguard News reported two dead and 20 more hospitalized due to excessive consumption of salt water. The deceased were believed to have had high blood pressure, a condition that is especially sensitive to high salt intake.
- Federal officials eventually tweeted out that this was a hoax
 - By Aug. 10, there were almost no tweets mentioning the bogus treatment
 - “All rumours of any other effective products or practices are false. Their use can be dangerous. In Nigeria, for example, at least two people have died after drinking salt water, rumoured to be protective.” - WHO advisory

What you can do?

- Get accurate information out fast before rumors take hold
- Be vigilant online to see what misinformation is spreading
- Contact media/hold press conferences to get out accurate information as fast as you can including what you DO NOT know
- Share information on multiple platforms
- Be sure to value digital as well as print media
- May also want to check out my related article on how social media is changing disaster response:
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-social-media-is-changing-disaster-response/>

Questions?