

Preparing for **PANDEMIC**S

Worldwide disease outbreaks - or pandemics - are an ever present danger. Influenza can strike at any time. **As well as causing illness and even death, pandemics can cause major disruption to businesses.** International SOS has a number of specialists dedicated to alerting clients to such risks. And helping them prepare.



The Medical Information & Analysis Team is based around the globe. This means they can apply the 'follow the sun' or 'round-the-clock' workflow and monitor emerging events 24/7.

SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE

One of the team members, Dr Barry Dyer, Manager, Medical Information & Analysis, is based in our London office. *"It's vital to track pandemic threats and be prepared for the next one. Although it is uncertain which virus will cause the next pandemic, and where it will arise, one thing is certain - another pandemic will happen"*, says Dr Dyer.

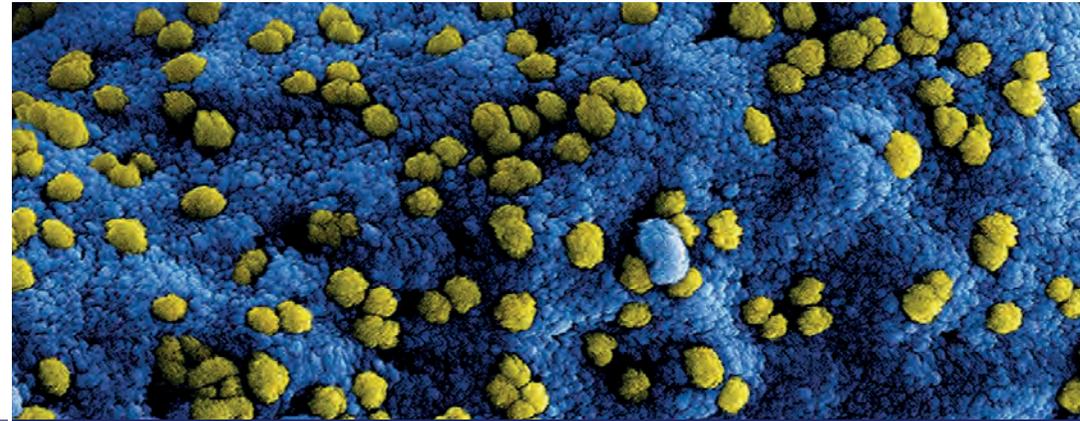
When a new virus emerges, there is often a lot that is unknown about it. As the scientific community studies the situation, there may be a rapid flurry of new information. The team maintains close links with many experts in emerging infectious diseases, including the virologist Professor John Oxford.

ZIKA VIRUS OUTBREAK

Zika virus is a mosquito borne disease of tropical areas. Since it appeared in Brazil in May 2015, it has been spreading explosively in the Americas, and could potentially spread to any area that has the type of mosquito that can carry Zika virus.

The majority of people infected have no or only mild symptoms, however there is growing evidence linking the disease to birth defects and neurological complications, and reports of sexual transmission from men to women. There is currently no vaccine, and no cure. Prevention is through preventing mosquito bites, and through public health and community measures to curb mosquito breeding.

As the greatest concern is over possible birth defects, many authorities are currently advising pregnant women to postpone travel to affected areas. For the latest developments, see the dedicated website:
<https://pandemic.internationalsos.com/zika>



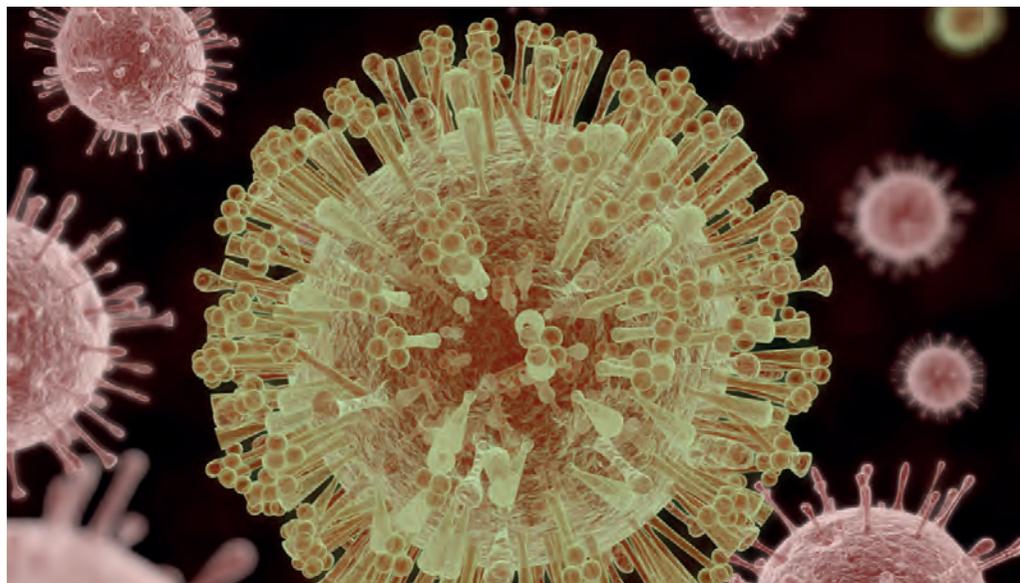
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DR BARRY DYER, MANAGER, MEDICAL INFORMATION & ANALYSIS, INTERNATIONAL SOS, LONDON



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: International SOS' pandemic preparedness website.

ABOVE: A highly-magnified micrograph reveals ultrastructural details at the site of interaction of numerous yellow-coloured MERS-CoV viral particles on the surface of a Vero E6 cell.



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SWINE-FLU

‘Swine flu (H1N1)’ was the first pandemic of the 21st Century. It started in 2009 near a pig farm in Mexico and spread to villages, towns and cities, and ultimately across the world. Like other pandemic viruses it was able to spread quickly between humans. This was facilitated by the large travelling population. As Dr Dyer points out, *“It’s shocking how quickly and how far it spread. We kept a very close eye on it.”* Eventually a vaccine was created.

The team is keeping a close watch on other potential pandemic threats, such as bird flu H5N1 and H7N9. Bird flu usually infect birds, such as poultry farmers, can get infected. A significant number of them develop a severe illness which can be fatal. Occasionally bird flu does spread from one person to another. However, if the virus adapts to spread more easily between people, a pandemic is possible.

MERS - COV

Another disease firmly on our radar is Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS - CoV). This new disease first appeared in 2012 in the Middle East. People are probably infected from exposure to camels however infected people can pass the virus to other people, and explosive outbreaks can occur, particularly in hospitals. Travellers risk spreading the disease to new areas. A single traveller triggered a large outbreak of over 150 cases in South Korea.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

“Advising travellers and managers about these diseases, including how to prepare, prevent and respond, is a key task”, according to Dr Dyer. Following the SARS outbreak, in response to the evolving landscape, a pandemic preparedness service was launched in 2005. Since then we have continued to enhance the information, tools and advice we provide.

In July last year, this culminated in the launch of our refreshed dedicated website: <https://pandemic.internationalsos.com>

As Dr Dyer explains, *“We totally revamped and re-launched the website to bring it up-to-date. We wanted to take advantage of the latest technological developments and find better ways of presenting information.”*

The site explains the background to pandemics and particularly focuses on current ‘active threats’.

There are also newly designed pandemic eLearning courses available for members and managers. The modules provide practical advice and information on how to keep safe and prepare for a potential pandemic. Our clients can access these courses via the International SOS Training Hub.

BEING PREPARED

There are different levels of access to the pandemic information. The public can gain a general overview of pandemics. International SOS members have more detailed advice on individual diseases as well as access to travel advice. Pandemic information subscribers can go even deeper. They can access the latest pandemic news as well as extensive background and scientific information on pandemic planning. They also have access to country-by-country situation assessments, planning tools, and educational materials to share with their employees.

Pandemic information subscribers also receive email updates and have access to regular webinars.

All this knowledge forms vital background information for the development of pandemic preparedness plans. Many of our clients are now using these crucial tools to help them mitigate their risks.

A RECOGNISED AUTHORITY

The website has been very well received. Our interactive map is particularly popular. Users can check the locations where they have operations to see the latest news on active threats.

Although information about diseases can be found elsewhere, International SOS is recognised as an authority. From the early days of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, many international agencies relied on our website as the first port of call, and many continue to use it on a daily basis.

As Dr Dyer points out, *“When there are evolving situations with a multitude of sometimes conflicting information, we can filter through it, using our people on the ground and contacts in many agencies to provide our members with reliable information that is comprehensive, up-to-date and actionable.”*

ABOVE:
Some airlines implement preventive measures regarding the MERS virus on their flights within affected areas.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP RIGHT:
Zika virus.