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Inserm

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Press release

Involvement of Inserm and its Aviesan partners in research on the ZIKA virus

In the last two years, nearly 2 million people have been infected with the Zika virus in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the end of 2015, REACTing and members of the Aviesan alliance immediately became involved, particularly Inserm, Institut Pasteur, the Institute for Development Research (IRD), the French Blood Transfusion Service and the associated university hospitals. Initial contact was made with Brazilian researchers from Fiocruz in November 2015. The international Zika Summit conference, taking place at Institute Pasteur on the 25 and 26 April 2016, will review ongoing research projects:

Several observational and clinical research projects on the monitoring of symptomatic pregnant women, monitoring of children with malformation of the nervous systems or born of infected mothers, construction of biobanks of biological specimens and samples, assessment of the penetration of the virus in populations, and mathematical modelling of its dynamics, have already begun. Teams working in the neuroscience area have also been assembled to begin projects on this theme in a coordinated manner, given the neurotropic nature of the Zika virus.

More specifically, projects strongly involving the French Departments in the Americas are concerned with the following:

- analysis of the **consequences of infection during pregnancy** for about 5,000 pregnant women in Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Martinique
- expansion of the **CARBO** cohort, a cohort of patients with acute arbovirus infection
- epidemiological analysis of cases of **microcephaly** and **Guillain-Barré** syndrome in French Polynesia (with strong involvement from Institut Pasteur)
- research on **sexually transmitted infection, and the persistence of the virus in semen**.

In terms of **diagnostics**, the aim is to rapidly develop a reliable method at individual and population scale, particularly aimed at **pregnant women** and **newborns**, taking into account the **variety of pathogens, particularly arboviruses, that co-circulate** in countries where

the Zika virus epidemic is rife.

Based on these initial elements, Inserm and its partners in the Aviesan alliance have responded to a **European call for proposals.** For the Aviesan partners, this means:

- mobilising all **French research forces** working in the area, as well as involving all **European** and **Latin American partners** in a common approach

- rapidly deploying **innovative research**, particularly on
    - Zika and the nervous system,
    - modelling the virus and its spatial configuration,
    - methods for controlling vectors,
    - the socio-economic dimension of the epidemic's spread;

- including partners that have **already worked with European funding** in similar situations, associated with dengue fever or emerging infections.

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