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***Risk Analysis* Releases Special Issue on Communicating About Zika Virus**

Herndon, Va. (Dec. 7, 2018) – Today, *Risk Analysis, an International Journal*, published a special issue, “Communicating About Zika,” which features several articles that were originally presented as works-in-progress at the Zika Communication Summit convened in March 2017 by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. This special issue provides theoretical and practical insights for public health officials, risk communication researchers and risk communication practitioners, and may serve as a template for guiding and studying the dissemination of rapidly evolving health information for future and re-emerging diseases.

In December 2015 the Brazilian government declared the Zika outbreak a national emergency and by mid-summer 2018 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had identified 2,474 pregnant women in the U.S. who had confirmed evidence of Zika infection. As health officials tried to educate the public on the dangers of the virus for pregnant women and their fetuses, and preventative behavior – since the virus can be spread both sexually and by mosquitoes – new information about health risks and transmission was constantly emerging. The situation provided researchers with the opportunity to track the dissemination of information via traditional and social media as well as its uptake, amplification and modification in the U.S. and its effects on public knowledge and risk perception.

The issue begins with an article by Marin Allen that explains how scientific understanding of Zika virus developed over time and how North American governmental agencies, at both the federal and state levels, addressed the public communication challenges presented by this public health issue. Next in the issue is a study by Sarah Sell which provides an overview of the media coverage patterns of the epidemic in the U.S. with an emphasis on the risk dimensions covered in mediated messages.

The following articles explore how media might impact risk perceptions and preventive behaviors. Hang Lu and Jonathon Schuldt use an experimental design to assess the potential effect of metaphoric framing on risk perceptions. Chun Yang and his team use survey data to analyze the relationship between personal, interpersonal and mediated communication on fear of Zika.

The potential influence of geographical locations on risk perceptions and related constructs are also explored. Kenneth Winneg and colleagues analyze the differences between Florida and the rest of the U.S. to assess the influence of proximity on potential responses to an outbreak. Branden Johnson explores the relationship between residential location and psychological distance on risk views and behavior related to Zika.

The issue concludes with two pieces focusing on the role of the online environment in risk communication regarding Zika. Sarah Vos explores the extent to which threat and efficacy information played a role in Twitter messages being retweeted and offers messaging theories based on the results. Christopher Wirz and his team examined how public discourse about Zika developed on Facebook and Twitter in English, Spanish and Portuguese, with an emphasis on blame attribution.

Articles included in this special issue:

- “Chronicling the risk and risk communication by governmental officials during the Zika threat” by Marin Pearson Allen
- “Rethinking social amplification of risk: Social media and Zika in three languages” by Christopher D. Wirz, Michael A. Xenos, Dominique Brossard, Dietram Scheufele, Jennifer H. Chung and Luisa Massarani
- “Residential location and psychological distance in Americans’ risk views and behavioral intentions regarding Zika virus” by Branden B. Johnson
- “Differences between Florida and the rest of the United States in response to local transmission of Zika virus: Implications for future communication campaigns” by Kenneth M. Winneg, Jo Ellen Stryker, Daniel Romer and Kathleen Hall Jamieson
- “Retweeting risk communication: The role of threat and efficacy” by Sarah C. Vos, Jeannette Sutton, Yue Yu, Scott Leo Renshaw, Michele K. Olson, C. Ben Gibson and Carter T. Butts
- “Frequency of risk-related news media messages in 2016 coverage of Zika virus” by Tara Kirk Sell, Crystal Watson, Diane Meyer, Marissa Kronk, Sanjana Ravi, Laura E. Pechta, Keri M. Lubell and Dale A. Rose
- “Communicating Zika risk: Using metaphor to increase perceived risk susceptibility” by Hang Lu and Jonathon P. Schuldt
- “Understanding fear of Zika: Personal, interpersonal, and media influences” by Chun Yang, James Price Dillard and Ruobing Li

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