

**Question:**

**It seems that significant stakeholders in the tourism sector don't want to be publicly associated with dengue prevention and control. They think this is bad publicity.**

**Are their concerns justified? How can this perception/situation be changed?**

**Host:** Dr Justus Benzler

The concern is understandable.

First stakeholders in the tourism business need to understand about Dengue and its consequences.

What are actually their concerns? That tourists wouldn't come?

The higher risk is **NOT TO TELL** about the risk. Imagine: an uninformed guest falls ill with dengue and blames e.g. the hotel for this.

Risks need to be quantified, e.g. comparison with the likelihood of experiencing a car accident.

The cost implications of different strategies and their likely outcomes (including the risk of being sued, e.g. for doing nothing) need to be compared.

Who are the stakeholders in the tourism business?

- Hoteliers, including small ones
- Airlines
- Travel agencies
- Cruise ships
- Restaurants
- Vendors, e.g. of handicraft, souvenirs
- Diving operators (or other activities, e.g. riding)
- Car (or boat) rentals
- Guides
- Sex workers

Hotels, airlines, tourist offices are all in a good position to distribute messages to tourists.

But on the other hand tourists may be in a mood where they just want to relax, without being bothered by risk communication.

Options: Combine the risk message with something positive, e.g. a promise to reimburse (parts of) the accommodation price.

Or with hand-out of repellents in a friendly manner.

The messages to tourists could be:

- There are ways to protect oneself against dengue.
- The risk is manageable.
- Knowledge helps.
- We (the tourism industry) care for you!
- As long as you are with us, you are safe. (This should not end at the resort limits.)

In Palau, tourism operators actually did something, e.g. clean-up of potential breeding sites in their area.

Palau also offers an information package to travellers via the Visitor's Website.

One could also offer information leaflets to tourists.

Informing tourists well about any known risks is actually an obligation.

Don't be ashamed of having dengue in your country.

Dengue is like a hole in a tooth. If you ignore it, it becomes worse.

Go on the offensive. Advertise yourself as dengue-aware/controlling.

Even better, if there were a way to certify this (like eco-friendly). Then a business could advertise itself as "dengue-control certified".

Certification may involve restrained and responsible use of insecticides. Then there could even be something like "certified ECO-FRIENDLY dengue control".

Publicise the prevention programmes in the country.

Surveillance information (a summary of the epidemiological situation) can be distributed by public health to tourism operators on a regular basis, and from them further distributed to individual tourists.

If this includes spatial data, it would be directly in a hotel's interest to do something and to show as a result that there is less risk in its neighbourhood than elsewhere (i.e. in a competitor's neighbourhood).