

ZIKA: DOCTORS ADVISE CAUTION THIS FESTIVE SEASON

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Aedes aegypti mosquito carries the Zika virus. AP James Gathany

Days after the Indian Council of Medical Research's surveillance system picked up over 30 positive cases of Zika virus – currently being reported by 86 countries worldwide – doctors in Delhi have advised extreme caution stating that the virus could travel with infected people during the festive season, which sees a lot of inter-State movement.

Symptoms of Zika virus disease are similar to other viral infections such as dengue, and include fever, skin rashes, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise, and headache.

R.K. Singal, principal consultant, director and co-ordinator of Medical and Allied Services, Internal Medicine, BLK Super Speciality Hospital, said: "Zika virus reaches people mainly through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. It can also spread during sexual intercourse with an infected person, from a pregnant woman to her foetus during pregnancy or around the time of birth, and through blood transfusion."

Dr. Singal added that most patients have only mild symptoms that include fever, rash, headache, joint pain, red eyes, and muscle pain.

Rarely, serious complications include Guillain-Barré syndrome and acute respiratory distress syndrome. Symptoms can last for several days to a week.

"There is no vaccine to prevent Zika," he said.

Dr. Singal added that the confirmation about the virus in Jaipur can be alarming for Delhi too, as this came in the middle of the festival season where many Indians travel, increasing the risk of spreading the virus.

Treatment is mainly symptomatic, that includes bed rest, drinking fluids to prevent dehydration and paracetamol to reduce fever and pain.

Zika virus is not common in India as of now. In 2017, only three laboratory-confirmed cases of Zika virus were reported in Gujarat.

A total of 32 positive laboratory-confirmed cases of Zika virus infection has been detected so far in Jaipur, Rajasthan. And, this number will only rise, said a senior health official.

In a release issued by him he added that Zika virus is gaining foothold in India and is now here to stay. Public awareness about Zika is low and diagnostic facilities are not available everywhere.

He added that while enhanced surveillance, community-based including at international airports and ports, to track cases of acute febrile illness is the need of the hour, creating public awareness about the disease including preventive measures should be the focus. At the same time, the public should be assured that there is no need to panic.

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