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**Zika Virus Prompts Health Department Alert for Pregnant Women Traveling to Affected Areas, Warning of Potential Sexual Transmission**

**Harrisburg, PA -**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Zika Virus Prompts Health Department Alert for Pregnant Women Traveling to Affected Areas, Warning of Potential Sexual Transmission**

*No Zika cases reported in Pennsylvania, DOH steps up monitoring efforts*

**Harrisburg, PA --** The Pennsylvania Department of Health is increasing its efforts to monitor and identify potential Zika virus cases in the commonwealth. No cases of Zika virus have been reported in Pennsylvania. Testing of individuals who have travelled to affected areas and have experienced symptoms is ongoing.

The department is monitoring the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which today issued new information on preventing sexual transmission of Zika virus. The guidance was published following laboratory tests confirmed the first case of Zika virus infection in a non-traveler in the continental U.S.

"The Department of Health is concerned about the health of all Pennsylvanians who are potentially at risk from Zika virus," said Health Secretary Dr. Karen Murphy. "We are following the guidelines set forth by the experts at the CDC and are fully committed to taking extra vigilance against this emerging health threat."

Although sexual transmission of Zika virus infection is possible, mosquito bites remain the primary way that Zika virus is transmitted. Because there currently is no vaccine or treatment for Zika virus, the best way to avoid Zika virus infection is to prevent mosquito bites, according to the CDC.

For pregnant women, and for men with pregnant sex partners who live in or have traveled to Zika-affected areas, the CDC recommends the following:

„h Pregnant women and their male sex partners should discuss the male partner's potential exposures and history of Zika-like illness with the pregnant woman's health care provider. Providers should consult CDC's guidelines for evaluation and testing of pregnant women.

Men with a pregnant sex partner who reside in or have traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission should consistently and correctly use condoms during sexual activity or abstain from sexual activity for the duration of the pregnancy. Consistent and correct use of latex condoms reduces the risk of sexual transmission of many infections, including those caused by other viruses.

For non-pregnant women, and men with non-pregnant sexual partners who live in or have traveled to Zika-affected areas, the CDC recommends:

Couples in which a man resides in or has traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission who are concerned about sexual transmission of Zika virus may consider using condoms consistently and correctly during sex or abstaining from sexual activity.

The CDC has issued a travel alert for people traveling to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Travelers should consult [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika) for updated information as new affected countries or regions are identified.

Concern about the virus was elevated following reports of increased cases of a serious birth defect known as microcephaly that may be associated with Zika virus infection among pregnant women.

The CDC recommends that pregnant women should consider postponing travel to these affected areas. Pregnant women who must travel to those areas should talk to their health care provider first and follow these steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip:

Dress in long-sleeved shirts and long pants.

Stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active.

Use insect repellent products containing DEET.

Do not overuse repellent – only apply as much as you need to provide protection.

Read and follow label directions before you use any kind of repellent.

The Department of Health is actively consulting with healthcare providers across the commonwealth and is tracking test results for Pennsylvania residents who may have come into contact with Zika while traveling to the affected areas. The results of those tests will be posted weekly on the department's website.

According to the CDC, the virus is primarily transmitted by mosquitos and cannot be transmitted by casual person-to-person contact. Up to this time, the mosquito that carries the disease has not been found in Pennsylvania. A related type of mosquito that can potentially carry diseases similar to Zika has been found in southern and

southeastern Pennsylvania but is not active in winter months. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is evaluating the resource requirements and scientific protocols needed to design a response.

Only one-in-five individuals who contract the virus exhibit symptoms. Symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain or conjunctivitis (red eyes) and typically begin two to seven days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Contact your health care provider if you experience any of these symptoms within two weeks after returning from traveling to an affected country.

Individuals can take a number of precautionary measures around their homes to help eliminate both mosquito-breeding areas, including:

- Dispose of cans, buckets, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or similar containers that hold water.
- Properly dispose of discarded tires that can collect water. Stagnant water is where most mosquitoes breed.
- Drill holes in the bottom of outdoor recycling containers.
- Have clogged roof gutters cleaned every year as the leaves from surrounding trees have a tendency to plug drains.
- Turn over plastic wading pools when not in use.
- Turn over wheelbarrows and don't let water stagnate in birdbaths.
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools not in use and remove any water that may collect on pool covers.

Additional information on Zika virus can be found on the Department of Health's website, [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov).

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