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ZIKA VIRUS UPDTAE
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Zika virus is a mosquito-borne flavivirus that was first identified in Uganda in 1947. Before 2007, only sporadic human disease cases were reported from countries in Africa and Asia. In May 2015, the World Health Organization reported the first local transmission of Zika virus in the Region of the Americas, with cases identified in Brazil. By January 20, 2016, locally-transmitted cases had been reported to the Pan American Health Organization from Puerto Rico and 19 other countries or territories. Currently, 19 states have had imported cases of the disease (none in West Virginia at this time).

The diagnosis of Zika virus infection can only be based on travel history or exposure. Symptoms of the virus include fever, joint pain, rash, conjunctivitis, headache and muscle pain. 80% of persons infected with Zika virus are asymptomatic so the infection is not commonly associate with hospitalization and death. Because there is no vaccine or antiviral for this infection, treatment consists of getting plenty of rest, keeping hydrated and taking a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (eg. ibuprofen) to relieve acute pain and fever.

The CDC (www.cdc.gov) has identified those territories and countries that have Zika virus present and are urging international travelers to take this into consideration before traveling to these territories and countries. It is strongly urging that pregnant women postpone any travel to Zika areas because of the possible connection between pregnant women who have been infected by the Zika virus delivering children with microcephaly (undersized heads and underdeveloped brains in newborns). Other authorities are recommending that women take precautions against becoming pregnant if traveling in an area known to harbor Zika virus. Consult with your personal physician before travelling for any questions.

As stated earlier, West Virginia has no imported Zika cases at this time. However, Zika is transmitted by the Aedes albopictus mosquito which is commonly found in West Virginia. While the US is not expected to be overwhelmed by the Zika virus as it has in Central and South America, there is the possibility that Zika virus could make its way into the mosquito population this year. This process can be slowed if international travelers returning to the US with a Zika infection avoid mosquito bites during the first week of illness. This will keep the Zika virus out of the local mosquito population. Residents of Monongalia County can also prepare to protect themselves from mosquito borne infections this summer by wearing proper protective clothing, using an FDA approved repellent and taking steps to control mosquito population in their immediate area (http://www.cdc.gov/westnile/prevention/index.html).

For more information or to answer any questions, contact Monongalia County Health Department at 304-598-5100.