Press Release

Zika a concern, can cause birth defects anytime during pregnancy

Three confirmed cases in India so far

New Delhi, 12 June 2017: According to statistics, three confirmed cases of Zika have occurred in India with the most recent one in January this year. In light of this, the IMA has urged to treat Zika as a concern during pregnancy and called for raising awareness on how to avoid contracting the disease. India saw the first Zika case in November 2016 when a 34-year-old woman who had just given birth to a healthy child came down with a fever. Tests confirmed that she was infected with the mosquito-borne Zika virus. Epidemiology indicates that for every positive case there are 200 subclinical cases.

A recent report has revealed that all pregnant women could see birth defects if infected with the Zika virus at any time. Of this, about 5% to 8% women infected during their first trimester, 5% during the second trimester, and about 4% infected in the third trimester had babies with Zika-related birth defects. This is proof of the fact that the virus remains dangerous throughout a woman’s pregnancy.

Speaking on this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "The environment in India is ripe for Zika due to the preponderance of the Aedes aegypti mosquito. The post-monsoon months when mosquitoes swarm, particularly in slum areas where there is standing water and accumulating trash, can produce many more infections. The risk of defects is slightly higher if the infection is contracted earlier in pregnancy. However, many women are not even aware of being infected until after they deliver a baby. This is because there may be no apparent rashes or signs of a clinical illness. It is also a fact that no one outside the government was aware of the three cases in India until after the WHO announced receipt of reports about them from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This points to the fact that there is a need to create awareness on the virus and its effects on the health of the person affected."

Two of the three people who tested positive in Ahmedabad were women, and both gave birth to healthy babies. About 40,000 samples have been tested across the country for Zika since July last year. Apart from the three reported cases in Ahmedabad, none were positive. However, the tests would detect recent active infections and not past exposure that could convey immunity.
Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "Some of the complications in babies infected with Zika virus are congenital brain abnormalities including microcephaly. There is no vaccination available till now for this infection. Few questions that need to be asked right now include: Should all women in pregnancy before 20 weeks get Zika antibody tested? Shouldn’t microcephaly be a notifiable disease now? There is a need to alert all concerned authorities and spread awareness on this disease."

Zika virus disease is usually mild and requires no specific treatment. The infected person should get plenty of rest, drink enough fluids, and treat pain and fever with common medicines. Pregnant women should wear clothes that cover their arms and legs so as to avoid getting a mosquito bite.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

For further information please contact:
Sanjeev Khanna - 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmad – 9873716235
hsgima@gmail.com
IMA Public & Media Advocacy Cell