

ZIKA VIRUS

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The Aedes Aegypti mosquito that transmits the Zika, Chikungunya, Dengue and Yellow Fever viruses. | Photo Credit: AFP

Even as Karnataka is awaiting reports of the Chikkaballapur mosquito pool samples that were found to be positive for Zika virus, the Centre has written to all States, including Karnataka, asking them to strengthen entomological surveillance and intensify vector control activities.

The letter — written by Union Health Secretary Sudhansh Pant to Chief Secretaries/ Administrators of all States on November 6 — referred to the recent detection of Zika Virus Disease (ZVD) cases in Kerala and Maharashtra.

“In addition, the virus has also been detected in mosquito pool samples from Chikkaballapur district of Karnataka. It is important to strengthen entomological surveillance and intensify vector control activities with a focus on areas with high vector density in order to prevent Zika virus transmission,” the official said in the letter.

Last month, samples collected from a mosquito pool in Thalakayalbeta village in the jurisdiction of Dibburahalli Primary Health Centre (PHC) during routine surveillance were found to be carrying the Zika virus.

The Health Department, which is closely monitoring the situation in the district, has sent serum samples of 30 pregnant women and four persons who had been treated for fever from five villages in the containment zone to the National Institute of Virology (NIV), for testing and reports are awaited.

“I am sure that an action plan and requisite logistics for vector management focusing on dengue and chikungunya is in place with the States. The same needs to be implemented for Zika and to be intensified in the areas from where either human case and mosquito pools are found positive,” the letter stated.

While a vast majority of the cases of ZVD are either asymptomatic or present with mild symptoms that are self-limiting in nature, WHO data from other countries suggests that Zika virus infection among pregnant women may result in microcephaly in the newborn in a minor proportion. In addition, Zika virus infection can also cause Guillain-Barré syndrome, neuropathy and myelitis, particularly in adults and older children, the letter pointed out.

“While these complications have not been reported so far from India, there is a need to be vigilant, particularly as the mosquito vector for ZVD is the same that transmits dengue and chikungunya and is found in large parts of the country. Equally important is the need to avoid any kind of panic in the general public by disseminating correct information. Like dengue and chikungunya, there is no specific drug or vaccine for ZVD as well. Therefore, it is important to strengthen surveillance,” the letter stated.

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