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Pa. family physicians on Zika virus: be vigilant, but don't panic

(HARRISBURG, PA – May 9, 2016) A few cases of the mosquito-borne Zika virus have cropped up in Pennsylvania over the last few months. As summer approaches and officials prepare for possible Zika outbreaks, Pennsylvania's family doctors are telling their patients to be vigilant, but not to panic over this potential public health threat.

According to the Pa. Dept. of Health, the Zika virus is mainly spread through the bite of an infected mosquito, although it is rarely spread from mother to child or through sexual contact or blood transfusion. The symptoms include fever, rash, muscle and joint pain, conjunctivitis, and headache. The Zika virus can also cause birth defects if a mother is infected during pregnancy.

"Most of the symptoms of Zika virus are very similar to those of other illnesses," said PAFP President Rob Rodak, DO. "If you're experiencing symptoms like a fever or rash, you should see your family physician for a proper diagnosis – and remember that in all likelihood, a mild health condition other than the Zika virus is probably responsible."

The Zika virus cases within the United States either originated abroad or were transmitted through sexual activity. No cases have been transmitted through local mosquitoes, but the mosquitoes carrying the virus could spread farther north during the warmer summer months.

The Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians and its Foundation supports its members (including nearly 80 percent of Pennsylvania family physicians) through advocacy and education to ensure a patient-centered medical home for every Pennsylvanian. The Academy and its Foundation are the leading influential resource among family physicians and physicians in training in Pennsylvania; the primary voice on health care issues with state legislative and administrative branches of government, media and professional health organizations; and the leader on health care issues in the community.

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