



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: Angela Lee, Health Director
(910) 989-3983
Angela_Lee@onslowcountync.gov

Date: February 19, 2016
For Release: *Immediate*

Onslow County Travelers Can Take Precautions to Avoid Zika

(Onslow County) – At this time, there are no cases of Zika in Onslow County or even in North Carolina. However, because so many county residents travel, it is possible that someone might return to the community infected with the virus.

Zika is not a new virus; however, it is rather new to the Western Hemisphere. First discovered in Africa decades ago, numerous cases of the virus began to appear in South America in 2015. Humans can be infected by Zika when they are bitten by a certain type of mosquito—the *Aedes* species mosquito. While some North Carolina mosquitos are of the *Aedes* species, no North Carolina mosquitos are carriers of the Zika virus at this time.

According to Jacob Farnsworth, Communicable Disease Nurse Manager at the Onslow County Health Department, “Most people who are infected with Zika never know because they have no symptoms. Those who do have symptoms can have a fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red/pink eyes). There is no vaccine to prevent Zika and no treatment for the virus itself; only symptoms can be treated.”

Zika has been in the news recently because people are concerned that the virus can cause babies to be born with underdeveloped brains or smaller heads, a condition known as microcephaly. Doctors and scientists are conducting studies now to determine if this is true.

What does the emergence of this virus so close to the United States mean for residents of Onslow County? “Since the virus is not here locally, the precautions are really for those who are travelling; however, since mosquitoes cause several types of disease, avoiding bites is good advice for everyone,” added Farnsworth.

The Onslow County Health Department is urging residents who travel to areas where Zika is present to take a few precautions to avoid an infection:

- Consider postponing travel to areas where the virus is active, especially if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. To find the list of countries that have been impacted, visit <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information>.
- If you must travel, and you are pregnant, please discuss your plans with your doctor.

--More--

- Avoid being bitten by a mosquito.
 - The *Aedes* mosquito likes to bite during the day and likes to live indoors, so be careful at all times.
 - Ensure that your hotel room or condo has air conditioning and screens on the windows.
 - Wear long sleeves and pants.
 - Use insect repellent, and pack it with you as it might not be available where you are traveling.
 - Sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- There is a concern that someone infected with Zika can spread the disease through sex; therefore, it is important that travelers use condoms or abstain from sex, especially with someone who is pregnant.

In addition to providing information to residents, the Onslow County Health Department staff is also educating medical providers, particularly those who see pregnant patients. It is important for patients to tell their medical providers about any travel that they have had so that a thorough medical screening can take place. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has given information to medical providers and health departments about when to test patients for the disease.

Clients who come to the Onslow County Health Department travel clinic and who are traveling to an area with Zika transmission will receive information about precautions they can take to avoid becoming ill during their trip.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 52 reported cases of travel-associated Zika virus in the United States. There are no locally acquired cases, meaning that every person in the United States that currently has the Zika virus was exposed to the virus when they were traveling in another country.

For more information visit www.onslowcountync.gov/health or www.CDC.gov or call the Onslow County Health Department at (910) 347-2154.

--End--