

## Zika Virus in Pakistan: A Looming Adversity?

Sir,

Zika Virus recently gained media attention when it shocked Brazil with approximately 1.5 million cases of Zika infection being reported. There were 3,718 cases of newborn microcephaly since 2015, compared to the average of 163 cases per year before this occurrence. This is not a new virus; the public has only been oblivious to it.

Zika virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*. This is the same mosquito that transmits dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever. Most people infected with Zika virus are asymptomatic and the clinical manifestation of the disease is usually mild with symptoms that last from a few days to a week. There is some evidence suggesting a link between Zika virus affecting women during their pregnancy and an increased risk of congenital microcephaly, but concrete studies are yet to be conducted to prove this association.<sup>1</sup> Potential sexual transmission of Zika virus has also been reported.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan harbours the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito; and according to Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Government of Pakistan, between 2011-2014 more than 48000 laboratory confirmed cases of dengue virus, carried by this mosquito, affected the country.<sup>3</sup> This figure should not be ignored as dengue being rampant in Pakistan indicates that there is a high-risk of transmission of Zika virus with a possibly similar tendency to spread as an epidemic across the country.

Effective control against the notorious mosquito can prevent the virus from spreading in Pakistan. Currently, no case has been reported from Pakistan; but due to

lack of effective implementation of public health measures, there are high chances that Zika virus can travel to Pakistan.

Vulnerable countries like Pakistan should have early warning systems and should also establish rapid diagnostic laboratories in different parts of the country so that any major outbreak could be halted at its initial stage.

Collective community initiative, together with social mobilization, can serve as a cornerstone towards containment efforts. Media agencies can help facilitate the government in spreading awareness to prepare the masses for any such outbreak. SMS alerts, educational camps and flyer distribution are options worth considering, for implementation. Public-private partnerships with international collaborations can also reinforce national programmes in controlling the proliferation of the vector responsible. The Zika virus is one potential traveller that needs to be denied visas all over the world.

### REFERENCES

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