

Zika disease is preventable; The Ministry of Public Health urges Thai people to “do 3 things to prevent 3 diseases” to control *Aedes* mosquitoes

February 18th, 2016 – Dr. Amnuay Gajeena, the Director General of the Department of Disease Control-Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), commented on the information released on February 12th by the World Health Organization (WHO), which labelled Thailand on the disease map as a red zone showing the graphic representation of the Zika disease similar to countries in Latin America. The WHO advised pregnant women to avoid visiting countries with Zika outbreaks. Some countries also alerted their people traveling to Thailand.

Dr. Gajeena said the WHO’s disease map represented cumulative data of the disease during the past 10 years (2007-2016), which did not reflect the current outbreak situation. However, the data indicated laboratory evidence showing the presence of the virus in the past 10 years. With the continuous effort of disease surveillance, the first Zika-infected patient was reported in Thailand in 2012 and about 5 sporadic cases per year thereafter. According to the information published in the international and local scientific journals, it is conceivable that the WHO included Thailand in the map to indicate an area of Zika detection. However, the MOPH expected that other countries in this Asian region may have a similar situation. The differences in information may be due to the efficiency of disease surveillance and detection systems among different countries. The MOPH will work closely with the regional WHO to confirm the real situation.

Dr. Gajeena reassured that Thailand continuously puts strong efforts to control Zika, following the advice and standards of the WHO and International Health Regulations (IHR). The MOPH works in coordination with relevant organizations, institutions, local authorities, and international agencies to closely monitor the situation. The public will be informed with new information promptly if the situation changes. Laboratory detection capacities, preparedness for medical care and readiness for vector control have been strengthened nationwide. He added that Zika disease has an incubation period of 4-7 days before showing symptoms such as fever, rashes, eye inflammation, and joint pain or swelling in some cases. Patients may also have headaches, weakness, diarrhea, and swollen lymph nodes. The disease is usually mild, and the patients will recover within 2-7 days with proper treatment.

Dr. Gajeena recommended the public to practice their normal daily lives, and there is no reason to panic. The public can be assured with the competency of our Thai disease surveillance. The public also should not believe rumors and instead should follow reports provided by the MOPH. It is important to note that about 80% of Zika infections have no symptoms. In the cases with symptoms, the disease is usually mild and self-recovering. Pregnant women may be at risk for abnormal fetal development or neurological complications. Pregnant women with suspected Zika-like symptoms should consult medical doctors immediately. Prevention of mosquito bites and elimination of mosquito’s breeding places are important measures.

The MOPH has asked for participation of all residents to control *Aedes* mosquito vectors and to eliminate the mosquito’s breeding places in household areas and communities. These actions are citizen duties, and they should be done immediately without waiting for help from public health personnel. The “Do 3 things – Prevent 3 diseases” approach could be done easily by (1) clearing the house to improve air ventilation and exposure to sunlight, (2) cleaning up garbage and discarded containers that may serve as mosquito breeding places, and (3) covering water containers to prevent mosquitoes from laying eggs. This approach can help in the control of Dengue, Zika, and Chikungunya. The Department of Disease Control hotline, tel. 1422, is available for further information.

Source: Thai article entitled "โรคติดเชื้อไวรัสซิกาป้องกันได้ สธ.ชวนคนไทยใช้มาตรการ “3 เก็บ 3 โรค” กำจัดยุงลาย" สำนักสื่อสารความเสี่ยงและพัฒนาพฤติกรรมสุขภาพ กรมควบคุมโรค วันที่ 18 กุมภาพันธ์ 2559 The English translation was edited by Chansak Suwanchaichinda, PhD, MPH