Three more Zika cases take Kerala's tally to 18

Focus on mosquito control & screening of pregnant women

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Three more persons have tested positive for Zika virus (ZIKV) in Kerala, taking the total number of cases reported so far to 18.

So far, lab-confirmed diagnosis of ZIKV has been reported only from Thiruvananthapuram. However, given the high density of Aedes species of mosquitoes across the State, the virus could be in circulation across the State.

ZIKV was confirmed in three of the eight samples sent from a private hospital in the city, from where the first ZIKV case had been reported, to the lab in Coimbatore. Two of the samples are of patients who sought treatment at the private hospital, including that of a 10-month-old infant. The third belongs to a hospital employee.

Of the 27 samples sent by the State earlier to NIV, Alappuzha, 26 had tested negative. The eight samples, of which three turned out to be positive, were part of the third lot of samples.

Major worry

Senior health officials said the focus of the control measures would be on the screening of all pregnant women with fever and other symptoms as well as initiation of mosquito control measures on a war footing.

As microcephaly (a condition in which a baby's head is smaller in size than normal because of abnormal brain development) caused by ZIKV infection in pregnant women is a major concern, the district administration has sent an alert to ultrasound scan centres and all gynaecologists that special attention be paid to the foetal biometric parameters at the scan at 6-8 weeks.

Similar symptoms

Sources said fever with rashes, red eyes and joint pain was being reported in the district from several urban locations since the past four or five months. But as all the samples tested negative for both dengue and chikungunya, not much thought had been given to it. "The possibility of ZIKV never struck us. The symptoms overlap with other viral fevers and that unless one specifically tests for ZIKV, we cannot confirm it," an official said.

A six-member team from the Centre held discussions with State officials on the steps to be adopted.