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The Latest on the Zika virus

*Delaware County's Intercommunity Health
provides update on Zika virus.*

During Delaware County Council's weekly public meeting on Feb. 3 Councilman David White addressed the concerns of the worldwide outbreak of the Zika virus, including the most recent case in Texas. Councilman White called on Delaware County's Senior Medical Advisor, Dr. George Avetian to provide an update and address possible concerns of local residents.

In May 2015, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued an alert regarding the first confirmed Zika virus infection in Brazil. The outbreak in Brazil led to reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome and pregnant women giving birth to babies with birth defects and poor pregnancy outcomes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced on Feb. 2 that Zika had been sexually transmitted in Texas, marking the first known case of the virus being locally acquired in the continental United States in the current outbreak. The case, announced by Dallas County health officials, involved a patient who had sex with someone who had recently returned from Venezuela and was infected with the mosquito-borne virus.

"The World Health Organization is warning that there could be 3 to 4 million cases of Zika virus in the Americas over the next year," said Delaware County's Senior Medical Advisor, Dr. George Avetian. "Currently there are about thirty cases of infected individuals in the United States. These cases were imported by travelers from endemic areas."

Originally the Zika virus was confined to Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Now at least 28 countries have reported presence of the virus.

The Zika virus is spread to people through mosquito bites. It was first identified in the Zika forest of Uganda in 1947. About 1 in 5 people infected with Zika will get sick. The typical symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting from several days to a week. The recent outbreak in Brazil has led to reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome and pregnant women giving birth to babies with microcephaly (small size head) and poor pregnancy outcomes. Babies with microcephaly often miscarry before they are born, or they die at birth.

"No vaccine exists to prevent Zika virus disease," said Avetian. "Zika is best prevented by avoiding mosquito bites."

Outbreaks of Zika previously have been reported in tropical Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Zika virus likely will continue to spread to new areas. The U.S. mainland does have *Aedes* species mosquitoes that can become infected with and spread Zika virus.

The CDC has issued travel notices for people traveling to regions and certain countries where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Information is available on the CDC website:
<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>.