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### **Health Department urges caution to Spring Break travelers due to Zika concerns**

CHARLEVOIX – Spring break is the time of year when many Michigan residents choose to travel and make memories with their friends, families, or loved ones. Unfortunately, this year, many of the foreign destinations favored by sun-seekers are also those areas that are affected by the Zika virus. Because of the potential link between Zika and birth defects, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan is urging pregnant women in any trimester to reconsider travel to those areas. Additionally, anyone traveling to an affected area should take precautions against mosquito bites.

The Zika virus is spread primarily by the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The disease has not been found in mosquitoes in the United States, but has been found in Puerto Rico, Mexico and much of Central and South America. The virus can also be spread sexually from infected men.

Most people who get the virus will never experience any symptoms. The most common symptoms of Zika are mild and may include a fever, rash, joint pain, and red itchy eyes. These symptoms usually last just a few days. Currently, no vaccine or treatment is available for the Zika virus.

“For people who are traveling in those areas, avoiding mosquito bites is the best prevention against this virus,” said Dr. Joshua Meyerson, Medical Director at the Health Department. “We encourage women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant to consider postponing their trips out of an abundance of caution.”

Meyerson advises anyone who has traveled to an affected location and experiences symptoms, either while on the trip or within a week of being home, to contact their doctor.

To avoid contracting the virus, the CDC recommends using mosquito repellants that contain DEET or other EPA-approved repellants. Use only as directed, and reapply often. Dress in long, loose, and light-colored clothing while outside, especially during the day. The mosquito that spreads Zika is most active during the daytime. Travelers visiting an affected area can further protect themselves by choosing lodging with air conditioning or screens, and by trying to avoid mosquito-infested areas like dense forests and stagnant water.

To learn more about the Zika virus, visit [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika) or [www.nwhealth.org](http://www.nwhealth.org). The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties.

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