

Health experts fear spread of Zika virus during monsoon

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At a time when the Gujarat health department is under fire for allegedly concealing information on Zika cases in Ahmedabad, health experts see the danger of the disease spreading during the impending monsoon season.

Being a vector-borne disease, Zika bears the risk of spreading in conducive weather conditions, especially the monsoon season, say virology experts.

The southwest monsoon has already set in over Kerala and will gradually cover the western and central parts of the country in the next fortnight.

The three identified Zika victims in Ahmedabad had

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not travelled to Zika-prevalent countries, which means the virus is of local origin.

"There is no need to panic, but this is an important development.

"This vector-borne virus was not present in the country earlier. The issue is that the vector is present in our country.

It is the Aedes mosquito, which also transmits dengue, malaria and chikungunya, that carries the Zika

virus too," DK Mangal, Dean (Research) with the IIHMR University told *BusinessLine*.

Surveillance

The State government has intensified surveillance in the disease-prone areas and launched awareness campaigns along with screening.

A source in the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said the Centre should also take swift action to ensure sensitization on Zika.

The most vulnerable groups to the Zika virus are pregnant women who are at risk of giving birth to children with microcephaly and other birth abnormalities, young children and the elderly.

Recently, the Gujarat government launched a campaign to make Gujarat malaria-free by 2022.

As part of the project, the State health department plans to cover over 15 lakh premises, including households, offices, academic institutions and commercial complexes to prevent mosquito breeding.

This will have an impact on the Zika virus as well.

"There is no specific treatment for Zika virus infection.

"The virus is not indigenous.

"It remains dormant till the person develops acute fragile illness. The virus may be present in healthy persons," Mangal said.