Editorial

Zika: Where Are You?

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Public health has always emphasized on the care of children, as nutrition, vaccination, and health in their earliest years have a strong influence on their lifetime health. Special emphasis is always given to the prevention of cognitive delays or brain damage, so important in modern society. In this journal, we have published articles on the use of folic acid and iodine supplements before and during pregnancy to reduce neural tube defects.\textsuperscript{1} Iron deficiency is very common in our region, and in most cases, iron supplements are given to mothers. Iron deficiency in infants and stunting from undernutrition may result in cognitive deficits. Head injuries often result in some permanent damage, and the journal has published pioneering articles on the use of helmets for riders.\textsuperscript{2,3} These are important public health issues and have resulted in population prevention programs including folate and iodine fortification, the use of folic acid and iron tablets for pregnancy, and laws to mandate helmet usage. Zika is the first virus to join the list of risk factors resulting in neurological impairment.

Zika virus (ZIKV) was first documented in 1947 in Africa and mostly stayed out of the sight of public health workers until recent years. In 2007, an epidemic of ZIKV was documented on Yap Island in the Pacific. In reported cases, the symptoms were relatively mild with a rash, fever, arthralgia, and conjunctivitis.\textsuperscript{4} It was subsequently found that 70% of the islanders were seropositive, perhaps suggesting that the virus had been endemic for some time. Duffy et al reported no congenital abnormalities, although the numbers were small and a comprehensive monitoring system is required to detect an increase against an ever-present background cases.\textsuperscript{4} The virus appears to have travelled from South East Asia through the Pacific Islands to South America. ZIKV belongs to the family of flaviviruses, which include arboviruses, yellow fever, dengue, and Japanese encephalitis.\textsuperscript{5} There are no treatments available for flaviviruses, but vaccines have been developed for yellow fever and Japanese encephalitis. The virus is transmitted by mosquito vectors, including \textit{Aedes} sp and may also be transmitted sexually.

Zika virus emerged as a major threat just before the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil, causing an unexpected epidemic of congenital neurological problems across South and Central America. In Brazil and in the US island territories in the Pacific Islands, antenatal infection with ZIKV resulted in a significant increase in the incidence of fetal central nervous system abnormalities, including microencephaly.\textsuperscript{6,7} In the French territories in America, birth defects associated with ZIKV infection were present in 7% of fetuses and infants whose mothers had

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