

Indonesia confirms Zika case, urges calm

February 3 2016

Indonesia Wednesday officially confirmed a case of the Zika virus dating back to last year but said it was prepared to handle any outbreak of the disease which has sparked alarm in the Americas.

Government officials confirmed a single case of the mosquito-borne Zika virus had been detected in Jambi on Sumatra island. It was discovered by researchers studying specimens taken during a dengue fever outbreak between December 2014 and April 2015.

"We found an infected patient in Jambi. The presentation by the health minister showed that it is under control," senior minister Puan Maharani told reporters after a high-level meeting convened by President Joko Widodo to discuss the virus.

Zika has sparked widespread alarm in parts of the Americas. It is suspected of causing grave brain damage in newborns and has similar symptoms to dengue fever.

Health experts have warned Asia is particularly vulnerable to the virus, given that the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito—which carries Zika, dengue fever and the chikungunya virus—thrives in its congested cities.

Officials in Indonesia, a tropical country of 250 million where urban outbreaks of mosquito-borne illnesses are common, called for calm and vigilance.

"People must not panic and continue to keep their surroundings clean,"

said Maharani.

"The government is ready to anticipate this so it does not become an epidemic in Indonesia."

The Jakarta-based Eijkman Institute said Sunday a 27-year-old man living in Jambi had been infected by the virus despite never travelling overseas.

The case was detected by chance as researchers examined specimens from a dengue fever outbreak, and concluded that the Zika virus had likely been circulating in Indonesia "for a while".

The World Health Organization has warned that the virus is "spreading explosively" in the Americas, with three million to four million cases expected this year.

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