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Nearly three-quarters of Americans would likely alter travel plans if destination had a Zika outbreak

PHILADELPHIA – Most Americans say it's likely they would change their travel plans if they learned that their destination had a Zika virus outbreak, a new survey has found. Asked if they would change a planned trip upon learning that there was a Zika outbreak at their destination, more than half of those questioned (52 percent) said it was "very likely" and 20 percent said it was "somewhat likely," according to the survey from the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania.

In addition, more than seven out of 10 people (71 percent) agreed with the statement that women living in areas affected by the Zika virus should avoid getting pregnant until a vaccine is found.

The Zika virus has spread throughout Latin America and a number of cases have been confirmed in the United States, though to date the continental U.S. cases have involved travelers returning from areas with Zika. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that pregnant women consider delaying travel to areas with Zika.

The findings come from the third in a series of weekly Annenberg Science Knowledge (ASK) surveys on public knowledge about the Zika outbreak and related policy issues and behavior changes. The phone survey was conducted for APPC by the research firm SSRS among 1,021 respondents from February 24-28. It has a margin of error for total respondents of +/-3.6 percent.

As in the first ASK survey, the current survey found that a vast majority of Americans (93 percent) know that mosquitoes transmit Zika, and most (82 percent) say that a pregnant woman who is infected with Zika is more likely to have a baby with an unusually small head. The Zika virus is strongly suspected of being linked to the birth defect called microcephaly, though a link is not yet confirmed, according to the CDC.

Should genetically modified mosquitoes be released in the United States?

Survey respondents also were asked about genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes:

- When asked whether scientists have established that GM mosquitoes caused the Zika virus outbreak, 24 percent said that was true, 24 percent said that was false and 44 percent said scientists are not sure. GM mosquitoes did not cause the outbreak, according to SciCheck, part of APPC's FactCheck.org.

- Asked if GM mosquitoes could minimize the spread of the Zika virus, 28 percent said that was true, 10 percent said that was false and 55 percent said scientists are not sure.

> Scientists think that GM mosquitoes may be able to help control the outbreak, according to SciCheck.

As part of the ASK survey, people were told that genetically modified male mosquitoes produce offspring that die before they mature to adulthood – a technique that's been shown to reduce mosquito populations by 95 percent. When the respondents were asked whether they would favor or oppose releasing these GM mosquitoes in parts of the United States to prevent the spread of the Zika virus, 43 percent said they would favor it and 33 percent said they would oppose it.

For data from the ASK survey and methodology, click here. For information about the prior ASK surveys click on the links below:

Half of Americans Concerned Zika Will Spread to Their Neighborhoods (Feb. 23, 2016)
Zika Survey: Some Incorrectly Link Pesticide and Vaccines to Microcephaly (Feb. 25, 2016)

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media's role in advancing public understanding of political and health issues. APPC's FactCheck.org is a nonpartisan "consumer advocate" for voters; SciCheck investigates false or misleading scientific claims made to influence public policy.