Zika virus and Disease Surveillance

Why in news?

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- The taxpayer’s money is spent on surveillance and routine disease data collection activities in India.
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- The data regarding disease prevention is so poor in the country and there is lack of information about the Zika virus.
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What is the issue?

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- The municipal authorities in Ahmedabad were unaware of the activities of Zika virus.
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- This fact itself smacks of either a very poor understanding of disease control principles, or, more likely, an uncoordinated, under-staffed and dysfunctional system.
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- Public resources were used for establishing the surveillance system, Thousands of samples were collected, screened and then sent for confirmatory testing, all of which costs money.
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- The purpose of this expenditure was and is to provide timely information to local agencies, so that they can implement mosquito-control measures and stop Zika virus transmissions.
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- But the data is not being utilised timely, this reflects a waste of surveillance activities and the public resources invested in setting these up.
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What are the complaints about Disease surveillance?

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- It is also the right of the public across the country to know what happened after the cases were identified.
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- Buy no such information provided to the stake holders.
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- No special care is taken for pregnant women.
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- No reports were prepared in order to check if there were additional cases in the area
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- No epidemiological protocols were available to support laboratory surveillance
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- Withholding information in order to prevent the population from panicking goes against the cardinal rule of public health.
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- The taxpayer’s money routinely goes to fund data collection for major diseases in the country.
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- There are multiple disease control programmes and collecting data is a major activity, sometimes requiring heroic inputs from grassroots-level workers.
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- Incomplete or poorly collected data is even more damaging as it can give wrong information for health planning activities.
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What is the way forward?

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- Data collection uses taxpayers’ money, and when the data is not used for improving people’s health, this is a waste of public funds.
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- It is not easy to track a virus in a billion-plus population but not acting after obtaining information is a criminal waste of resources.
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- Poor health communication and its disastrous consequences amongst the public, having a catastrophic impact on the country’s economy.
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- A review of disease surveillance systems is required, not only to make this

entire system relevant, but also to appreciate the hard work of data collection which is done by lower-level functionaries.
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- The goal is not to haphazardly collect data, but to use this data for protecting the health of the population.
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- Government stewardship of this whole system is essential, to listen, regulate and bring about a cohesive health service that can provide care to the people.
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- India has enough technical resources and expertise.
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- The critical role of the government in demonstrating leadership and guiding disharmonious participants is essential.
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Source: Indian Express

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