Zika Virus

NJ Health
New Jersey Department of Health

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Zika virus (Zika)?
Zika is a viral infection that is usually spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. It can sometimes be spread by having sex with an infected man. Outbreaks typically occur in tropical Africa and southeast Asia. In May 2015, Brazil reported the first outbreak of Zika in the Americas. Zika is now present in many tropical areas. It has not yet been spread in the continental United States.

Who gets Zika?
Anyone who gets bitten by an infected mosquito, or who has unprotected sex with an infected man can become infected with Zika.

How do people get Zika?
People most often get Zika through the bite of an infected *Aedes* mosquito. This is the same mosquito that spreads dengue and chikungunya. People can also get Zika by having unprotected sex with an infected man.

What are the symptoms of Zika?
About one in five people develop symptoms and infection is usually mild. The most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain or red eyes. Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache. Symptoms usually begin two to seven days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and last several days to a week. Hospitalization and deaths from Zika are unusual, but a nerve disorder, Guillain-Barré Syndrome, can rarely follow an infection. The biggest concern is related to birth defects that have been seen when pregnant women become infected.

How is Zika diagnosed?
The symptoms of Zika are similar to those of dengue and chikungunya, which are diseases caused by other viruses spread by the same type of mosquitoes. See your healthcare provider if you develop the symptoms described above and have visited an area where Zika is present. If you are at risk, your healthcare provider may order blood tests to look for Zika or other similar viruses.

What is the difference between Zika, dengue and chikungunya?
All of these viruses cause similar symptoms, but certain symptoms suggest one disease or another. Most Zika patients have skin rashes; Most dengue patients have a higher fever and more severe muscle pain; Most chikungunya patients have a higher fever and more intense joint pain in the hands, feet, knees, and back.

What is the treatment for Zika?
There is no specific treatment for Zika. Symptoms are treated by getting rest, drinking fluids to prevent dehydration and taking medicines such as acetaminophen or paracetamol to relieve fever and pain. Aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen and naproxen, should be avoided until dengue can be ruled out to reduce the risk of increased bleeding.

Can people with Zika pass the illness to others?

Zika needs a vector (a means of transportation) to infect people; generally, that vector is the mosquito. However, Zika virus has been found in semen and person-to-person sexual transmission has been documented. Travelers to an area with Zika should continue to take steps to prevent mosquito bites for three weeks after they leave the Zika-affected area to avoid spreading the virus, even if they do not feel sick. Only one in five infected people develop symptoms. Zika virus can be found in the blood of an infected traveler and passed to another mosquito through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people.

How can Zika be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites?

No vaccine or preventive drug is available at this time. The best way to prevent Zika is to avoid mosquito bites when traveling to an area where Zika is present.

- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent. Many insect repellents are safe for pregnant women and children to use, but be sure to check the product label for any warnings and follow the instructions closely.
- When indoors, use air conditioning, window screens or insecticide-treated mosquito netting to keep mosquitoes out of the home.
- Reduce the number of mosquitoes outside the home or hotel room by emptying or routinely changing standing water from containers such as flowerpots, pet dishes and bird baths.
- Weather permitting, wear long sleeves and pants when outdoors.

For information on how best to be protected against all diseases related to travel, visiting a clinician with expertise in travel medicine is recommended before a planned trip.

What is the risk of Zika in pregnancy?

Mounting evidence supports a link between Zika and microcephaly, a birth defect that is a sign of incomplete brain development, and possibly other problems such as miscarriage and stillbirth. The rate of these complications is not known but is being studied further. It is unknown how to prevent these possible pregnancy complications, but unintended pregnancies can be prevented.

How can sexual transmission of Zika be prevented?

CDC recommends that men with a pregnant partner should use condoms every time they have sex or not have sex for the duration of the pregnancy. To be effective, condoms must be used correctly from start to finish, every time during sex. This includes vaginal, anal or oral (mouth-to-penis) sex.

- Couples with men who have confirmed Zika or symptoms of Zika should consider using condoms or not having sex for **at least six months** after symptoms begin. This includes men who live in or traveled to areas with Zika.

- Couples with men who traveled to an area with Zika but did not develop symptoms of Zika should consider using condoms or not having sex for **at least eight weeks** after their return in order to minimize risk.

Couples who do not want to get pregnant should use the most effective contraceptive methods that they can use consistently and correctly, and they should also use condoms to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika.

How long should I wait to get pregnant?

For women and men who have been diagnosed with Zika virus or who have symptoms of Zika including fever, rash, joint pain or red eyes after possible exposure to Zika virus, CDC recommends:

- Women wait **at least eight weeks** after their symptoms first appeared before trying to get pregnant.
- Men wait **at least six months** after their symptoms first appeared to have unprotected sex.

For men and women without symptoms of Zika virus but who had possible exposure to Zika from recent travel or sexual contact, CDC recommends healthcare providers advise their patients wait at least eight weeks after their possible exposure before trying to get pregnant in order to minimize risk.

Where can I get more information on Zika?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department (directory of local health departments in NJ: http://www.state.nj.us/health/lh/documents/lhdirectory.pdf)
- NJ Department of Health: http://www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html
- CDC Travel Health Notices: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices
- For the most updated information for timing of pregnancy after Zika exposure and
- prevention of sexual transmission, visit the CDC website: www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/s0325-zika-virus-recommendations.html

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Pan American Health Organization.

Revised 4/18/16