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Frequently Asked Questions: Zika Virus

What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is a mild febrile illness caused by a mosquito-borne virus similar to those that cause dengue and West Nile virus infection. It has been linked to serious birth defects when contracted by pregnant women. It has been identified in several countries in Central and South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands since 2015. Outbreaks have previously been reported in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Local transmission has previously been reported in Texas and Florida.

How is Zika virus transmitted?

Zika virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito, including the same mosquitoes that can transmit dengue and chikungunya. It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. It is unknown how often this occurs or what stage of pregnancy is most at risk. There are no reports of infants getting Zika virus through breastfeeding. In addition, Zika virus can be transmitted through sexual activity and in rare cases, through blood transfusion or organ/tissue donations.

Who is at risk of being infected?

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found who has not already been infected with Zika virus is at risk for infection. The risks associated with infection in pregnant women are higher due to linkages to birth defects.

What are the symptoms of Zika virus infection?

People typically develop symptoms between 2 and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito. Zika fever is a mild illness with only 1 out of 5 cases known to show symptoms. Signs and symptoms of Zika virus may include: acute onset of low-grade fever, rash, joint pain, conjunctivitis (reddening of eye), body aches, headache, eye pain, and vomiting. Severe cases of the disease requiring hospitalization are uncommon.

An association between microcephaly and other birth defects was identified in infants exposed to Zika virus during pregnancy. There are many causes of microcephaly in babies, including genetic anomalies, environmental factors, and some infections acquired during pregnancy. Congenital Zika virus infection has also been linked with decreased brain tissue and anomalies of the eyes and limbs.

What treatment options are available for Zika virus illness?

Since there is no specific treatment against the virus, treat the symptoms by getting plenty of rest, drink fluids to prevent dehydration, and take medicines to relieve fever and pain. Illness typically resolves within a week. Do not take aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

What can I do to prevent Zika virus infection?

The best way to avoid Zika virus is to prevent mosquito bites. The Florida Department of Health encourages Florida residents and visitors to protect themselves from all mosquito-borne illnesses by taking the following precautions.

DRAIN standing water to stop mosquitoes from multiplying

- Drain water from garbage cans, buckets, pool covers, coolers, toys, flowerpots or any other containers where sprinkler or rainwater has collected.
- Discard old tires, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pet's water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

COVER skin with clothing or repellent

- Clothing-Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.
- Repellent-Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing.
 - Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products are effective.
 - Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months old. Sleep under a mosquito bed net when outside or in a room that is not screened.

COVER doors and windows with screens

- Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

Who can I call to spray for mosquitoes around my house?

In Florida, many counties and cities have mosquito control services. The mosquitoes that spread Zika breed in small containers so you can also limit your risk by eliminating all sources of standing water in bird baths, flower pots, etc. on your property at least weekly.

What should I do if I think I have the Zika virus?

Contact your health care provider if you think you or a family member might be ill due to Zika virus infection. Travelers returning home from areas with active Zika virus transmission should avoid being bitten by mosquitoes for three weeks following travel, especially while ill, to prevent infection of local mosquitoes. Women who were traveling in areas where Zika virus was active during their pregnancy should consult with their obstetrician.

What is the status of Zika virus in Florida?

There are currently no areas of ongoing, active transmission of Zika locally in Florida. Travelers to Florida should always take precautions to protect against mosquito bites (such as repellents) and sunburns (sunscreen, sunglasses).

I am pregnant or am trying to become pregnant. Should I travel to a country where cases of Zika have been reported?

CDC has issued a travel alert (Level 2-Practice Enhanced Precautions) for people traveling to regions and certain countries where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Because specific areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are likely to change over time, please visit

wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices for more information on current travel notices and www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/ for an updated list of counties with Zika virus transmission.

Until more is known, and out of an abundance of caution, CDC recommends special precautions for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant:

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other healthcare provider first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.
- Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their healthcare provider before traveling to these areas and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.
- If the male partner of a pregnant woman lives in or travels to an area with active Zika virus transmission the couple should abstain from sex or use condoms every time they have vaginal, anal and oral sex for the duration of the pregnancy.

What is being done to prevent transmission of Zika virus in Florida?

Each suspected case of Zika virus infection is tested at the state public health laboratory. County health department staff report suspect Zika fever cases to local mosquito control staff to make sure mosquito control activities are put in place. State and local health departments work closely with other parties to make sure people at risk for Zika virus infections as well as health care providers stay informed with the most current science about Zika fever.

Can Zika virus harm pets or livestock?

There is no evidence to date that suggests that Zika virus can harm domestic pets or livestock.

Additional information

For more information on mosquito bite prevention visit Florida Department of Health, www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/mosquito-borne-diseases/prevention.html and <https://zikafreefl.org/>.

For information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) visit www.cdc.gov/zika/.

Also available in Spanish at

www.cdc.gov/spanish/mediosdecomunicacion/comunicados/d_recomendaciones_viajeros_virus_del_zika_011516.html.

For more information on Zika virus and pregnancy, visit www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/index.html.

For Mosquito-borne disease and vector surveillance, please visit

www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/mosquito-borne-diseases/surveillance.html and www.cdc.gov/zika/vector/index.html.