

ZIKA WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Volume 3
Summer 2024

WHAT IS ZIKA VIRUS AND HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Zika virus is a type of *Flavivirus*. More commonly known members of this family of viruses include West Nile virus, yellow fever virus and dengue virus. Each of these viruses is most commonly spread through the bite of an infected mosquito.

Zika virus is spread by the *Aedes* species of mosquitoes, and unlike many other mosquitoes, this type typically bites during the daytime when people are also most active. Mosquitoes become infected after biting an infected person, and then they spread the virus to another person when they bite again.

Transmission of Zika virus can also occur during pregnancy, causing an infection in the unborn infant. Babies infected before birth can suffer a variety of consequences (see “What are the symptoms of Zika virus?”).

Transmission through sexual contact has also been documented. Zika can be passed via sex from an infected person to their partner regardless of whether the infected person has symptoms. To protect their partners, infected individuals should abstain from relations or use condoms for at least two months (females) and three months (males) since the virus takes time to clear from biological fluids.

Zika virus has also been spread through blood transfusions; however, no cases of this type have occurred in the U.S. due to testing of blood product donations for Zika virus during periods when the virus has been circulating.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ZIKA VIRUS?

Many people with Zika virus will not develop symptoms (about 8 of 10) or will only experience mild symptoms, such as fever, rash, joint pain or conjunctivitis (pink eye). Other symptoms could include muscle pain and headache. Symptoms typically last several days to a week. Fewer than 1 in 100 people die from Zika infections.

Two potential outcomes of Zika virus infection are more worrisome:

- Congenital Zika syndrome — a group of birth defects in babies infected with Zika during gestation. Babies may have one or more of the following:
 - Microcephaly — a condition in which an infant is born with a significantly smaller head size compared with other infants of the same age and gender. Often, this condition indicates a smaller than normal or underdeveloped brain.
 - Damage to the brain, eyes, ears or throat
 - Seizures
 - Joints with limited range of motion
 - Increased muscle tone causing restrictive body movement
- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) — a condition characterized by weakened muscles and sometimes paralysis. GBS typically resolves after a few weeks. However, the condition is alarming and some people experience permanent nerve damage.

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WHO IS AT RISK?

Anyone who lives in or travels to an area where Zika virus has been found and who has not previously been infected with Zika virus can be infected. Once a person has been infected with Zika virus, they are likely to be protected from future infections.

Adults are more likely to require medical attention for Zika virus infections, and unborn babies are at greater risk because of the link between infection during pregnancy and birth defects. For this reason, pregnant people are advised to follow several protective measures, including refraining from travel to areas with Zika outbreaks, using methods to prevent mosquito bites if they are in an area with Zika, and abstaining or having protected sex with partners who may be infected with Zika.

IS THERE A ZIKA VACCINE?

No. A vaccine is not currently available to protect against Zika virus. Several types of Zika vaccines are in clinical trials, so hopefully, a vaccine will become available in a few years.

HOW CAN MY FAMILY STAY HEALTHY?

For people who live in or plan to travel to areas where Zika virus is present, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid mosquito bites. You can protect yourself by wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts and using insect repellents approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). You can also eliminate standing water to prevent mosquitoes from breeding. Pregnant people are recommended to avoid travel to countries where Zika virus outbreaks are occurring if possible. Likewise, people who may become pregnant should use protection during each sexual encounter with a partner who has recently been to an area where Zika virus is present.

You can stay up to date on the situation with Zika virus by visiting these websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — [cdc.gov/zika](https://www.cdc.gov/zika)
- World Health Organization (WHO) — [who.int/health-topics/zika-virus-disease](https://www.who.int/health-topics/zika-virus-disease)

This information is provided by the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The Center is an educational resource for parents, the public and healthcare professionals and is composed of scientists, physicians, mothers and fathers devoted to the study and prevention of infectious diseases. The Vaccine Education Center is funded by endowed chairs from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The Center does not receive support from pharmaceutical companies. ©2024 Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. 24274-06-24.