



# Pregnancy & Zika virus

## What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is a member of the flavivirus family that is spread by mosquito bites (similar viruses cause dengue virus, yellow fever virus, and West Nile virus).

This type of mosquito usually bites during the daytime and breeds in standing water.



## Where does it occur?

Outbreaks have occurred in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Americas. The large outbreak during 2015 and 2016 is over but Zika virus persists at low levels in some countries in the Americas, Asia and Africa.

## What are the symptoms?

The illness is usually mild; typical symptoms include low-grade fever, rash, joint pain (hands and feet), and conjunctivitis.

Two or more of these symptoms suggest a Zika infection in those people in or from a known Zika infested area. Only one in five people will have symptoms. Most people have no symptoms.

The time between mosquito bite and clinical onset is typically 2 to 14 days. Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

## How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis of Zika virus infection is by a blood test.

## Why is it important?

Zika virus infection has been associated with complications during pregnancy: congenital microcephaly (baby born with a smaller head than usual) and fetal losses (miscarriage, very early delivery). An association is also suggested with Guillain-Barre syndrome (progressive weakness of muscles – limbs initially and then other muscle groups).

## How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for Zika virus infection and there is no vaccine for prevention.

## How can I avoid infection with Zika virus?

A number of authorities have advised that pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas with ongoing mosquito transmission of Zika virus.

If visiting these areas, pregnant women should be particularly careful regarding adherence to mosquito protective measures.

Sexual transmission of Zika virus has been described; further study is needed.



It is sensible for individuals with Zika virus infection/exposure to abstain from sexual activity (vaginal, anal, and oral sex) or use barrier protection (ideally condoms).

Men who have a pregnant partner should use condoms for the duration of the pregnancy.

Zika virus is also transmissible via blood products; postpone giving blood for one month following Zika virus infection/exposure.

## Pregnant and travelling?

If you are unable to postpone travel to an area where Zika has been reported, minimize your chances of infection by:

- **Screens and bed net**  
mosquitos can live indoors and bite day and night
- **Insect repellent**  
an EPA-registered insect repellent –  
use on top of sunscreen  
[www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you](http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you)
- **Permethrin spray**  
Use to treat clothing and gear (boots, pants, socks, tents, and other fabrics). Do not use directly on the skin
- **Standing water treatment tabs**  
Use to kill larvae in standing water
- **Condom use**  
Sexual transmission of Zika virus from a male partner is possible. If you have sex (vaginal, anal, or oral) with a male partner, you should use condoms the right way every time. If a partner returns from a 'Zika-infected' country, use condoms during the rest of pregnancy.

## Concerns?

If you think that you may have been exposed to the virus visit your regular doctor for advice.