

# Get the Facts: Zika

An outbreak of Zika (ZEE-KA) virus is occurring in parts of Central and South America, the Caribbean, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Currently, people living in the greater Chicago area who have not traveled to these areas are generally not considered at risk for infection. This fact sheet provides basic information about Zika virus and what you can do to protect yourself and your family. For more information, please visit [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika).

## What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is a virus spread primarily by mosquito bites in regions mentioned above. People living in or traveling to these areas are at risk for infection. Symptoms of Zika virus are usually mild and last for several days to a week, but infection is more concerning in pregnant women. Zika virus can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus, and infection during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects.

## What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

Roughly one in five people infected with Zika virus becomes ill, so many people may not realize they have been infected. When they develop, symptoms are mild and usually appear two to seven days after a person is bitten. Symptoms can include fever, rash, joint pain, red eyes, muscle pain and headache. Those infected typically recover within one week and hospitalization is uncommon. Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

## How is Zika virus spread?

Zika virus is spread primarily through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitos. If an *Aedes* mosquito bites a person infected with Zika virus and then bites another person, the virus can spread to the second person. Zika virus is *not* spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or casual contact, the way cold and flu are. Because Zika virus is not known to spread through casual contact, the public at large is at extremely low risk of transmission in areas without *Aedes* mosquitos. Sexual transmission of Zika virus has also been reported. Most importantly, Zika can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus during pregnancy or at birth.

## How can Zika virus affect a pregnant woman and her fetus?

We are still learning about the effects of Zika virus infection during pregnancy. Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly ("small head"), as well as other problems with the brain and eye, and hearing and growth problems in the fetus. However, not all women infected with Zika during pregnancy have poor pregnancy outcomes. While we learn more, pregnant women **should not travel** to areas with Zika transmission. Women trying to become pregnant should discuss travel to these areas with their healthcare provider. If a woman must travel or lives in an area with Zika transmission, she should strictly prevent mosquito bites and prevent sexual transmission. If you are pregnant and traveled to a region where Zika is present during your pregnancy, contact your healthcare provider to discuss the need for blood tests or ultrasound.

## What is the risk of getting Zika virus in Chicago?

Risk of locally transmitted Zika virus for Chicago residents is very low. The primary species of mosquito that has been found to transmit Zika virus (*Aedes aegypti*) is not native to Chicago and cannot survive our cold winters. A secondary species of mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) has been found in Illinois and may be able to transmit Zika, presenting a very small risk of locally acquired cases. Health officials are closely monitoring for the presence of *Aedes* mosquitoes in Chicago and are working to control the mosquito population in Chicago to help protect against all mosquito-borne illnesses, including West Nile Virus. The full potential range of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitos can be seen at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/zika-mosquito-maps.pdf>

## What is the risk of getting Zika virus if I travel to areas where locally-acquired dengue virus has been a problem, such as Florida?

As of May 11, 2016, no Zika transmission by mosquitos has been reported in the continental U.S., which includes the 48 contiguous states and Washington, D.C. all cases in the continental U.S. have been in people returning from areas with ongoing Zika transmission, or in sexual partners of travelers. However, *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos are found in much of the southern U.S. In years past we have occasionally seen transmission of a different virus, called dengue virus, which is also spread by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos in southern states and Hawaii. This suggests that we may see Zika transmission in areas with *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos in the future. Check the CDC website for up-to-date information regarding confirmed Zika cases, especially in states where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is commonly found.

### **My husband or boyfriend travels to areas affected by Zika virus for work sometimes. How do I prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus?**

CDC recommends that men with a pregnant partner should use condoms every time they have sex or they should not have sex for the duration of the pregnancy. To be effective, condoms must be used correctly and every time during sex.

- Couples with men who have confirmed Zika or symptoms of Zika (see symptoms above) should consider using condoms or not having sex for at least **6 months** after symptoms begin. This includes men who live in and men who 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 **8 weeks** after their return in order to minimize risk.
- Couples with men who live in an area with Zika but have not developed symptoms might consider using condoms or not having sex while there is active Zika transmission in the area.

### **If we want to have a baby and have recently traveled to an area affected by Zika virus and didn't become ill, how long should we wait before trying to conceive?**

For men and women without symptoms of Zika virus but who had possible exposure to Zika from recent travel or sexual contact, CDC recommends that couples wait at least **8 weeks** after their possible exposure before trying to get pregnant in order to minimize risk. Please talk to your healthcare provider regarding effective temporary methods of birth control, including condoms. Condoms or not having sex are necessary to prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus.

### **If we want to have a baby and have recently traveled to an area affected by Zika virus and one of us experienced fever, rash, joint pain or red eyes within 2 weeks of travel, how long should we wait before trying to conceive?**

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 **8 weeks** after their symptoms first appeared before trying to get pregnant.
- Men wait at least **6 months** after their symptoms first appeared to have unprotected sex.
- Please talk to your healthcare provider regarding effective temporary methods of birth control, including condoms. Condoms or not having sex are necessary to prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus.

### **How can I protect myself and my family from Zika virus?**

As of today, there is no vaccine for Zika virus. Pregnant women should postpone travel to regions where Zika transmission is ongoing, if possible. If you do have to travel to an area with Zika transmission, the best protection is to avoid getting mosquito bites. Even here in Chicago, where we do *not* have the mosquito of primary concern for Zika virus, you should protect yourself from all mosquito-borne viruses, including West Nile Virus.

- Use insect repellent as directed
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- When traveling, stay in lodging with air conditioning
- Close windows/doors without screens and, when traveling, sleep under mosquito nets
- Empty or cover outdoor containers that hold water, where mosquitos like to lay eggs

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 12, 2016; [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika)