

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Zika virus (Zika)?

Zika is a viral infection that is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. 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 tropical areas.

Who gets Zika?

Anyone who gets bitten by an infected mosquito can become infected with Zika.

How do people get Zika?

Zika is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. This is the same mosquito that transmits dengue and chikungunya.

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 3-12 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and last several days to a week. Hospitalization and deaths from Zika are rare.

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, although this is uncommon. If you have Zika, avoid mosquito bites for the first week of your illness. During the first week of infection, Zika virus can be found in the blood and passed from an infected person to another mosquito through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people.

How can Zika be prevented?

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 insect repellent. Repellents containing DEET, picaridin IR3535 and oil of lemon eucalyptus PMD provide long lasting protection against mosquitoes that may transmit virus such as Zika, dengue and chikungunya.
- 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?

Zika can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika while pregnant. Until more is known about the link between Zika and these outcomes, CDC recommends the following special precautions:

Women who are pregnant (in any trimester):

- Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
- If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your doctor first and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

Women who are trying to become pregnant:

- Before you travel, talk to your doctor about your plans to become pregnant and the risk of Zika virus infection.
- Strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

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>

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.