

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Zika virus (Zika)?

Zika is a viral infection that is usually spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. It can sometimes be spread by having sex with an infected partner. 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 many countries and territories, although a widespread outbreak in the continental United States is not expected.

Who gets Zika?

Anyone who gets bitten by an infected mosquito, or who has unprotected sex with an infected partner can become infected with Zika.

How do people get Zika?

People most often get Zika through the bite of an infected *Aedes* mosquito. This is the same mosquito that spreads dengue and chikungunya. People can also get Zika by having unprotected sex with an infected partner.

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 2-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and last several days to a week. Hospitalization and deaths from Zika are unusual, but a nerve disorder, Guillain-Barré Syndrome, can rarely follow an infection. The biggest concern is related to birth defects that have been seen when pregnant women become infected.

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 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. Travelers to an area with Zika should continue to take steps to prevent mosquito bites for 3 weeks after they leave the Zika-affected area to avoid spreading the virus, even if they do not feel sick. Only one in five infected people develop symptoms. Zika virus can be found in the blood of an infected traveler and passed to another mosquito through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people.

How can Zika be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites?

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 an EPA-registered insect repellent. Many insect repellents are safe for pregnant women and children to use, but be sure to check the product label for any warnings and follow the instructions closely.
- 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 virus infection during pregnancy is a cause of microcephaly and other severe fetal brain defects and has been linked to problems in infants, including eye defects, hearing loss, and impaired growth. Scientists are studying the full range of other potential health problems that Zika virus infection during pregnancy may cause.

How can sexual transmission of Zika be prevented?

Zika can be passed through sex from a person who has Zika to his or her sex partners. Sex includes vaginal, anal, oral sex, and the sharing of sex toys. Zika can be passed through sex, even if the person does not have symptoms at the time. The chart below shows how long to use condoms or not have sex.

For People Who Have Traveled to an Area with Zika*	
If you are pregnant	Pregnant women should not travel to areas with Zika. If you must travel to an area with Zika, talk to your healthcare provider.
If your partner is pregnant	Use condoms correctly, every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex or do not have sex for the entire pregnancy.
If you and your partner are planning a pregnancy	Consider avoiding nonessential travel to areas with active Zika transmission. Discuss your plans for pregnancy with a healthcare provider to determine your risk and the options available.
If you or your partner are not pregnant and are not planning a pregnancy	Men: consider using condoms or not having sex for at least 6 months after travel (if you don't have symptoms) or for at least 6 months from the start of symptoms (or Zika diagnosis) if you develop Zika. Women: consider using condoms or not having sex for at least 8 weeks after travel (if you don't have symptoms) or for at least 8 weeks from the start of symptoms (or Zika diagnosis) if you develop Zika.

How long should I wait to get pregnant?

A woman thinking about pregnancy, who has recently traveled to an area with local Zika transmission*, should talk to her healthcare provider after returning.

Suggested Timeframe to Wait Before Trying to Get Pregnant	
After a Possible Zika Virus Exposure**	
If you or your partner are planning to conceive in the near future	Consider avoiding nonessential travel to areas with active Zika transmission*.
Women	Wait at least 8 weeks after symptoms start or last possible exposure.
Men	Wait at least 6 months after symptoms start or last possible exposure.

*CDC maintains a current list of areas with active Zika transmission: www.cdc.gov/zika/geo.

**Possible Zika virus exposure is defined as recent travel to or residence in an area of active Zika virus transmission or sex (vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, and oral sex, and the sharing of sex toys) without using a barrier method to prevent infection, such as male and female condoms and dental dams, with a man or woman infected with Zika or who traveled to or resided in an area of active Zika virus transmission.

Couples who do not want to get pregnant should use the most effective contraceptive methods that they can use consistently and correctly, and they should also use condoms to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika.

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>
- For the most updated information for timing of pregnancy after Zika exposure and prevention of sexual transmission, visit the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/transmission/sexual-transmission.html>

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.

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