

Zika Virus

What is Zika virus?

Zika is a virus (germ), spread by mosquitoes, which can cause fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red or pink eyes). Most people infected with Zika virus do not even get sick.

How is Zika spread?

Zika virus is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother who has been bitten by an infected mosquito to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth.

Outbreaks of Zika have occurred in areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. During 2015, Zika virus was found in South America for the first time. Since then, it has spread to many countries in Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

How common is Zika virus in Massachusetts?

The kinds of mosquitoes that are known to carry Zika virus are generally not found in Massachusetts. At this time, it is extremely unlikely that someone would become infected with Zika virus from a mosquito bite in Massachusetts. However, travelers to affected areas may be bitten by infected mosquitoes during their trip and some of them are being diagnosed with Zika virus disease when they return to the United States.

What happens when people get Zika virus infection?

Most people (80%) who are exposed to Zika virus will not get sick. If they do get sick, symptoms start 2-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms may include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes).

What is the risk from Zika virus infection if I am pregnant?

In pregnant women who become infected with Zika virus, it is possible for the virus to spread to the baby. There is concern that when this happens, it can sometimes result in a birth defect that causes abnormal brain and head development (microcephaly). The risk of this defect occurring, even after Zika virus infection, is low. Ultrasounds over the course of pregnancy are the best way to check on the baby.

Am I at risk for Zika virus?

At this time, only people traveling to places with ongoing Zika virus outbreaks are at risk for getting the disease. If you are traveling to Central America, South America, or the Caribbean, you should check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for information about where it is occurring <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>.

Who is at greatest risk from Zika virus disease?

Until more is known, pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant should consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other healthcare provider first and take great care to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.



Is there any treatment for Zika virus?

There is no specific treatment for Zika virus infections, but most people do not become seriously ill and recover quickly. If you are pregnant and are bitten by mosquitoes while traveling in an area with Zika virus, you should contact your prenatal care provider. Specific testing for Zika virus is limited, and not always necessary. However your healthcare provider may suggest using ultrasound to check on the baby.

What can you do to protect yourself from Zika virus?

Since Zika virus is spread by infected mosquitoes, here are some things you can do to reduce your chances of being bitten **when you are traveling in an area with Zika virus**:

- When you are outdoors, wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and socks. This may be difficult to do when the weather is hot, but it will help keep mosquitoes away from your skin.
- Use a repellent with **DEET** (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), **permethrin**, **picaridin** (KBR 3023), **IR3535** (3-[N-butyl-N-acetyl]-aminopropionic acid) or **oil of lemon eucalyptus** [p-menthane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] according to the instructions on the product label.
 - **When used as directed on the product label, insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, and IR3535 are safe for pregnant women.**
 - DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children.
 - Oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years of age.
 - Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear and should not be applied to skin.
 - More information on choosing and using repellents safely is included in the MDPH Mosquito Repellents fact sheet which can be viewed online at www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito. If you can't go online, contact the MDPH at (617) 983-6800 for a hard copy.
- Try to stay in places that use air conditioning or window and door screens.
- Empty standing water from outdoor containers.

Unlike mosquito-borne illness here in Massachusetts, Zika virus is spread by mosquitoes that bite during the day. This means that when traveling in an area with Zika virus activity, it is especially important to take these steps to prevent mosquito bites during daytime hours as well as between dusk and dawn.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse, or health care clinic, or your local board of health (listed in the telephone directory under local government)
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850, or on the MDPH Arbovirus website at www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito
- **Health effects of repellents:** MDPH Bureau of Environmental Health at 617-624-5757

