

How the Zika Virus Can Impact Your Health

The Zika virus is a flu-like virus that is transmitted by both mosquito bites and through sex. The outbreak started in Brazil, through Latin America, and is now in Florida.

A skin rash is a common symptom of Zika infection. Joint pain, fever, red or itchy eyes may be associated.

The biggest danger; however, is that the Zika virus is known to cause birth defects such as microcephaly (improper brain development).

Zika Spreads by Mosquitos and Sex

The disease is transmitted, or spread, by mosquitos which transmit the infection from person- to-person. A person infected with the Zika virus becomes "viremic." In other words, the virus is present in the bloodstream of infected individuals.

The virus may also be sexually transmitted. [As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), men infected with Zika can pass the virus to both female and male partners. Sexual transmission of the virus can be prevented by proper use of a condom.

Symptoms of Zika Virus

Most people infected with Zika do not show symptoms. But for those that do show symptoms, the most common symptoms include: rash, fever, joint pain, headache, and conjunctivitis/red eyes. Symptoms may last 7-10 days and are usually mild.

There is no treatment or vaccine for Zika at this time. Over the counter fever and pain relief is generally effective for mild symptoms.

Zika Causes Birth Defects

Zika can cause [birth defects](#) including microcephaly (small head) in the unborn child or even cause loss of the pregnancy. It is not known when the unborn baby may be most at risk for developing birth defects.

Microcephaly may cause mental retardation as well as developmental delays in growth, movement and speech.

A [complete list of suspected birth defects](#) caused by Zika can be found in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Vaccine Research

There is no treatment or vaccine for the virus at this time. Inovio Pharmaceuticals has received [FDA approval for clinical trials](#) for their Zika vaccine. The company has also been awarded a [grant from the Wistar Institute funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

Virus Discovered in Africa

Zika was originally discovered in Uganda in 1947. At first, the virus was found to only infect Rhesus monkeys, but in 1968 the virus was detected in humans in Nigeria. The disease has been spreading rapidly after reaching Latin America in 2014. The association with birth defects has only been recently suspected due to the increasing number of worldwide cases.

Zika in Florida

[Puerto Rico reported the first locally acquired Zika virus](#) case in the United States in 2015. As of October, 2016, [180 cases had been confirmed in Florida](#), principally in Miami-Dade county. The disease is transmitted by the Aedes mosquito which thrives in tropical conditions. Areas along the Gulf Coast, such as Houston, New Orleans, and Tampa-St. Petersburg may be potential hotbeds for virus spread.

The virus likely spreads via infected tourists who introduce the virus to a new region where the Aedes mosquito already exists.

Do Not Travel

The CDC recommends that pregnant women should avoid travel to areas at risk for Zika. Here are some quick links:

- [World Map](#) - areas throughout the world where Zika is a risk
- [Continental U.S. and Hawaii](#) - guidance for "red" and "yellow" areas of the U.S.
- [Zika in Texas](#) - recommendations for traveling to Brownsville, Cameron County, Tx
- [Zika in Florida](#) - advice for people living in or traveling to South Florida

Are You at Risk?

The CDC recommends that pregnant women who have traveled to active Zika areas get tested by their doctor for the virus. Men who have a pregnant partner should use a condom for the duration of the pregnancy if they live in or travel to areas of Zika infection.

If you have questions, please consult your doctor.

Avoid Mosquito Bites and Practice Safe Sex

If you live in or travel to an area with active Zika, men and women should consult their doctor. In addition, here are the recommended tips to [avoid mosquito bites](#) and [practice safe sex](#).