

What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is transmitted by mosquitoes, such as *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*. It is closely related to Dengue, Yellow Fever, West Nile and Japanese Encephalitis viruses, which are also transmitted by mosquitoes.

Prior to 2007 only a small number of Zika virus cases were recorded. Since then, a number of outbreaks have been reported from islands in the Western and South Pacific. In early 2015 the first Zika virus case was noted in Brazil and the associated outbreak is now affecting many countries in the Americas (South and Central America and the Caribbean).

What are the symptoms?

Most people (approximately 80%) exposed to the Zika virus do not develop symptoms. Those who do will typically develop mild symptoms such as low-grade fever, rash, muscle pain, short term joint pain, conjunctivitis (red eyes), eye pain, chills and headache. Less common symptoms may include weakness, lack of energy, sore throat, diarrhea and nausea/ vomiting. Symptoms, when present, typically last between two to seven days.

Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon and deaths associated with Zika virus are rare. However, evidence continues to mount suggesting that Zika virus infection is associated with neurological complications (e.g. Guillain-Barre Syndrome) and increases in birth defects (e.g. microcephaly). Further investigation is ongoing.

How long does it take to get symptoms if you have been infected?

When present, symptoms may develop in 3 to 12 days following the bite of an infected mosquito.

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

It is important to remember that most people exposed to the Zika virus do not develop symptoms.

However, if symptoms develop within two weeks of return from an affected area, it is recommended that you visit a primary care provider (e.g. doctor, nurse practitioner, midwife etc.). Symptoms will typically resolve within a week.

What if am pregnant?

It is recommended that pregnant women avoid travel to areas with a current Zika virus outbreak, or areas at risk of outbreak. If travel cannot be delayed use personal protection measures to prevent mosquito bites and see your primary care provider upon your return, regardless of whether you have symptoms.

How is Zika virus infection diagnosed?

Zika virus infection is diagnosed by testing a person's blood or urine for the virus.

As symptoms of Zika virus infection are similar to other tropical diseases such as Dengue, Chikungunya and Malaria additional tests may be conducted to rule these out. Other diseases such as Influenza and Measles may also be considered as they are common in tropical and subtropical countries.

Can Zika virus infection be cured?

There is no specific treatment or cure for Zika virus infection. Treatment is focused on relieving the symptoms.

How does Zika virus spread?

Zika virus is spread primarily through the bite of infected mosquitoes. The species of mosquito that can carry the virus are commonly found in the tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas (stretching from the US Midwest into Argentina). These mosquitoes live in close proximity to humans and are most active and biting during the daytime and early evening hours.

Can the Zika virus spread by person-to-person contact?

While most spread is linked to the bite of an infected mosquito, less common types of spread have been observed. These include mother-to-child transmission, transmission via transfusion of infected blood and sexual transmission. Further research regarding these types of spread is still ongoing.

Should pregnant women or those attempting to become pregnant take any special precautions?

Pregnant women are advised to avoid travel to areas with a current Zika virus outbreak, or areas at risk of outbreak. For women planning a pregnancy it is strongly recommended that they consult a primary care provider and consider delaying travel to areas affected by the current outbreak. If travel cannot be avoided then the use of personal protective measures against mosquito bites, such as skin repellents and preventing mosquito entry into living areas, should be followed closely.

What is the risk of sexual transmission of Zika virus?

While research as to the role of sexual transmission continues, caution is recommended. Women should avoid becoming pregnant during travel to an area affected by the ongoing Zika virus outbreak, or an area at risk, and for two months after return from said area(s).

For men who show no symptoms condom use is recommended for a period of 6 months after returning from an area affected by the ongoing Zika virus outbreak, or an area at risk.

What is being done to protect Canada's blood supply?

Canadian Blood Services continues to monitor the situation. Donors with a history of travel outside of Canada, the continental United States and Europe will be required to wait for 21 days following their return before donating blood, or blood products as well as cells/tissues/organs donations.

What can I do to lower my risk of Zika virus infection?

There is no vaccine or medication to protect against Zika virus infection. Travelers to areas affected by the current outbreak, or those areas at risk of outbreak, are at greatest risk. To reduce this risk, travelers should take every effort to prevent mosquito bites. Some common tips include:

- Use an appropriate insect repellent (i.e. those containing DEET or Icaridin),
- Wear protective clothing,
- Use bed nets,
- Keep doors closed and window screens in good repair; and,
- Use air conditioning.

Should school groups or organizations postpone or cancel travel plans to the affected regions?

School groups and organizations are encouraged to consult the Public Health Agency of Canada's Travel Health Notices webpage (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/notices-avis/index-eng.php>) for updated information.

Can Zika virus be contracted in Manitoba?

The risk of local transmission of Zika virus in Canada is low. While the species of mosquito that can carry the virus are unable to survive the cool weather in Manitoba or Canada, the role of local species in potential Zika virus transmission is unknown at present. Research is ongoing to determine whether local mosquito species can transmit the virus.

The risk of sexual transmission of the virus from a returning traveler is low, however precautions (i.e. use of condoms, abstinence) should be taken particularly if attempting to become pregnant or if pregnant.

Where can I get more information?

For More information visit:

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/zika.html