

Q & A – Zika Virus

Q. *What is Zika virus?*

A. Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness spread primarily through mosquito bites – similar to how West Nile virus or dengue virus is TRANSMITTED.

Q. *What are the symptoms of Zika virus?*

A. The most common symptoms of Zika are:

- fever,
- rash,
- joint pain, and/or
- conjunctivitis (red eyes). Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache.

Q. *How is Zika virus spread?*

A. Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito and not person-to-person like the flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact has been reported.

Q. *How serious is Zika virus?*

A. About 1 in 5 people INFECTED with Zika virus will become sick. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon and deaths are rare. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week, but it can be found longer in some people.

Q. *Are there cases of Zika virus in Illinois?*

A. As of February 4, 2016, IDPH is reporting three confirmed, travel-related cases of Zika virus in Illinois residents. Two cases were among pregnant women and the third in a man. These individuals traveled separately to Colombia, Haiti and Honduras. The locations of these residents are not being released as there is no risk to the public of transmission of the virus.

With the recent outbreaks in other countries where Zika virus has been found, the number of Zika virus disease cases among travelers visiting or returning to the United States will likely increase, although we cannot predict by how much.

Q. *Are Illinoisans at risk of Zika virus? Do the mosquitoes in Illinois carry the virus?*

A. The risk of Zika virus to Illinoisans is very low. Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito and not person-to-person like the flu. The type of mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) that carries Zika virus has rarely been found in Illinois and is more prevalent in tropical climates. This type of mosquito also cannot survive the freezing temperatures we see in Illinois.

Zika virus infections have been reported in travelers returning to Illinois from countries with ongoing transmission.

Q. *What if people have returned from traveling to one of these countries? Should they see a doctor? How recent would travel need to be?*

A. People should see their health care provider if they develop the symptoms described above within two weeks of traveling to an area where Zika virus is present. People should tell their health care provider when and where they traveled, and their activities.

Health care providers who believe a patient may be infected with Zika virus should contact their local health department to discuss testing.

Q. *Should people cancel travel to these countries?*

A. Because Zika virus is spread primarily by mosquitoes, CDC recommends that all travelers protect themselves from this disease by taking steps to prevent mosquito bites - use insect repellent, wear long sleeves and pants, and stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens.

CDC recommends that pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other health care provider first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip. Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their health care provider before traveling to these areas and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.

Q. *If a person is infected with Zika virus, how long does the virus last?*

A. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week but it can be found longer in some people.

Q. *Are you immune for life once infected?*

A. According to the CDC, once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

Q. *Does Zika virus infection in pregnant women cause birth defects?*

A. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly (a condition in which a baby's head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age) and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. Knowledge of the link between Zika virus and these outcomes is evolving, but until more is known, CDC recommends special precautions for the following groups:

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.

Q. What is Illinois doing to prepare for Zika virus, especially as the weather warms up?

A. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), in partnership with local health departments and hospitals across Illinois, has a robust surveillance system (Illinois National Electronic Disease Surveillance System), which we recently expanded to include Zika virus. IDPH has provided guidance to local health departments, hospitals, infectious disease physicians, and infections control preventionists about basic Zika virus information, and direction on what health care providers should look for and do, as well as laboratory testing protocol. IDPH is in the process of obtaining certification from CDC to test for Zika virus.