

# Get the Facts: Zika

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An outbreak of Zika (ZEE-KA) virus is occurring in parts of the world, including Central and South America, the Caribbean, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Transmission is also emerging in other places, including Florida, and this situation is evolving. Currently, people living in the greater Chicago area who have not traveled to these areas are generally not considered at risk for infection. This fact sheet provides basic information about Zika virus and what you can do to protect yourself and your family. For more information, please visit [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika).

## What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is a virus spread primarily by mosquito bites in regions mentioned above. People living in or traveling to these areas are at risk for infection. Symptoms of Zika virus are usually mild and last for several days to a week, but infection is more concerning in pregnant women. Zika virus can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus, and infection during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects.

## What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

Roughly one in five people infected with Zika virus becomes ill, so many people may not realize they have been infected. When they develop, symptoms are mild and usually appear two to seven days after a person is bitten. Symptoms can include fever, rash, joint pain, red eyes, muscle pain and headache. Those infected typically recover within one week and hospitalization is uncommon. Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

## How is Zika virus spread?

Zika virus is spread primarily through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitos. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite a person already infected with the virus (for example, a returned traveler, who is infected with Zika but who may or may not have symptoms). Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites. Anyone who travels to an area where Zika virus is found, who has not already been infected with Zika virus, can get the infection from mosquito bites. As of July 29, 2016, local transmission from mosquitos to people has been reported in Miami-Dade County, Florida, an area where *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes are present. Zika virus is *not* spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or casual contact, the way cold and flu are. Because Zika virus is not known to spread through casual contact, the public at large is at extremely low risk of transmission in areas without *Aedes* mosquitos. Sexual transmission of Zika virus has also been reported. Most importantly, Zika can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus during pregnancy or at birth.

## How can Zika virus affect a pregnant woman and her fetus?

We are still learning about the effects of Zika virus infection during pregnancy. Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects of the brain, including microcephaly ("small head"), as well as other problems with the eye, hearing, and growth problems. However, not all women infected with Zika during pregnancy have poor pregnancy outcomes. While we learn more, pregnant women **should not travel** to areas with ongoing Zika transmission. Women trying to become pregnant should discuss travel to these areas with their healthcare provider. If a woman must travel or lives in an area with Zika transmission, she should strictly prevent mosquito bites and prevent sexual transmission. If you are pregnant and traveled to a region where Zika is present during your pregnancy, contact your healthcare provider to discuss the need for blood tests or ultrasound.

## What is the risk of getting Zika virus in Chicago?

Risk of locally transmitted Zika virus for Chicago residents is very low. The primary species of mosquito that has been found to transmit Zika virus (*Aedes aegypti*) is not native to Chicago and cannot survive our cold winters. A secondary species of mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) has been found in Chicago and may be able to transmit Zika, presenting a very small risk of locally acquired cases. Health officials are closely monitoring the presence of *Aedes* mosquitoes in Chicago and are working to control the mosquito population in Chicago to help protect against all mosquito-borne illnesses, including West Nile Virus. The full potential range of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitos can be seen at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/zika-mosquito-maps.pdf>

## What is the risk of getting Zika virus if I travel to areas in the U.S. where locally acquired Zika virus has been seen, such as Florida or Texas?

The first cases of local Zika virus transmission by mosquitos in the continental U.S. were reported in Miami-Dade County, Florida in July, followed by locally acquired cases reported in Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas in November, 2016. These cases were not unexpected, as these states and others, are known to have the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito of primary concern. Both Florida and Texas health officials are aggressively working to reduce mosquitoes in the area of reported cases, going door-to-door to reduce standing water, and conducting community surveys to assess for more cases. Currently, CDC recommends that pregnant women avoid non-essential travel to Miami-Dade County, FL and Brownsville, TX. However, anyone in any city or state where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is present, especially pregnant women, should use mosquito repellent and avoid mosquito bites.

We may see Zika transmission in other areas with *Aedes* mosquitos in the future. Check the CDC website for up-to-date information regarding confirmed Zika cases, especially in states where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is commonly found. In Illinois, where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is rarely seen, all cases have been in people returning from areas with ongoing Zika transmission.

### **My partner travels to areas affected by Zika virus for work sometimes. How do I prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus?**

For pregnant women and their partners:

CDC recommends that pregnant women and their partners use condoms every time they have sex or they should not have sex for the duration of the pregnancy. To be effective, condoms must be used start to finish every time they have sex. This is important, even if the pregnant woman's partner does not have symptoms of Zika or feel sick. Traveling partners of pregnant women should take steps to prevent mosquito bites while in an area with Zika.

For couples considering pregnancy:

CDC suggests women wait at least 8 weeks after symptoms start or last possible exposure (such as travel from an area with Zika or sex without a condom with a partner infected with Zika) before trying to get pregnant, and men wait at least 6 months after symptoms start or last possible exposure (such as travel from an area with Zika or sex without a condom with a partner infected with Zika) before trying to conceive. Women and their partners should discuss pregnancy planning with a trusted doctor or healthcare provider. As part of counseling with healthcare providers, some women and their partners living in areas with active Zika virus transmission might decide to delay pregnancy.

For others concerned about sexual transmission of Zika:

People with a partner who traveled to an area with Zika can use condoms or not have sex. CDC suggests women use condoms or not have sex for at least 8 weeks after symptoms of Zika start or return from travel from areas with Zika. Men should use condoms or not have sex for at least 6 months after symptoms of Zika start or return from travel. This extended period is because Zika stays in semen longer than in other body fluids.

### **How can I protect myself and my family from Zika virus?**

As of today, there is no vaccine for Zika virus. Pregnant women should postpone travel to regions where Zika transmission is ongoing, if possible. If you do have to travel to an area with ongoing Zika transmission, the best protection is to avoid getting mosquito bites. Even here in Chicago, where we do *not* have the mosquito of primary concern for Zika virus, you should protect yourself from all mosquito-borne viruses, including West Nile Virus.

- Use insect repellent as directed
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- When traveling, stay in lodging with air conditioning
- Close windows/doors without screens and, when traveling, sleep under mosquito nets
- Empty or cover outdoor containers that hold water, where mosquitos like to lay eggs

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 20, 2016; [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika)

All fact sheets are also accessible at the CDPH #StopZika page.

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdph/supp\\_info/infectious/get-the-facts-zika.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdph/supp_info/infectious/get-the-facts-zika.html)

