

# Zika Virus

## Questions You May Have

### What is Zika virus?

Zika virus infection, also called Zika virus disease, is caused by a virus which is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Skin rash
- Muscle and joint pain

The symptoms are generally mild and last between 2 to 7 days. Most people infected with Zika virus have no symptoms at all. At this time, there is no specific treatment or vaccine.

### Are there any risks of complications from Zika virus?

Yes. Some countries have reported a significant increase in the number of newborns with microcephaly (abnormally small head), and a number of countries have reported an increase in the number of cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a neurological disorder. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, experts agree that Zika virus infection causes microcephaly and GBS.

### Where is Zika virus found?

Zika virus is transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes, which are found in South America, Central America, Mexico, Central, East, and West Africa, South and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and the Ocean Pacific Islands. The virus was originally found only in Africa and Asia and was first reported in the Western Hemisphere in 2015.

There have been no reported cases of locally acquired Zika virus in Canada. The type of mosquito that is known to spread the virus to humans is not found in Canada. The only cases of Zika virus reported in Canada have been travel related. For more detailed information about which countries are affected, visit [Government of Canada - Zika virus: Latest travel health advice](#).

## **Who is at risk of getting Zika virus?**

The following people could be at risk of getting Zika virus:

- People who travel to regions where Zika is circulating. More than 65 countries in the Caribbean, Central America & Mexico, South America, South and Southeast Asia, Ocean Pacific Islands and Central, East and West Africa have reported Zika cases.
- Possibly the sexual partners of people who have recently visited areas where Zika virus is present.
- A developing baby exposed to the Zika virus when the mother is bitten by an infected mosquito, or possibly when the mother is exposed to the virus through sexual contact with an infected partner.

## **Should pregnant women be concerned about Zika virus?**

Yes. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, experts agree that Zika virus causes microcephaly. Microcephaly is a condition where a baby is born with a small head or the head stops growing after birth. Pregnant women, or those who plan on becoming pregnant, should avoid travel to countries or areas with ongoing Zika virus outbreaks. For more information about travelling while pregnant, speak with your health care provider or see [HealthLinkBC File #41g The Pregnant Traveller](#).

## **How can I protect myself and my family?**

Anyone travelling to areas affected by Zika virus is advised to consult a health care provider or visit a travel health clinic, preferably 6 weeks before planned travel. If you are pregnant you should consider postponing your travel plans and discuss your risk with your health care provider.

If you do travel to an area affected by the Zika virus:

- Protect yourself from mosquito bites at all times. You should take precautions throughout the day and night, when you are both indoors and outdoors. For advice on how to protect you and your family from mosquito bites, see [HealthLinkBC File #96 Insect Repellents and DEET](#).
- Women planning to get pregnant should consider waiting at least 2 months after returning from a Zika infected area or after onset of illness due to Zika (whichever is longer) before trying to conceive. This recommendation is based on the incubation period of the virus, the duration of the illness, and the time required to clear the virus. Speak with your health care provider for more information.

- Men should use condoms with any partner that could become pregnant for 3 months after returning from a Zika infected area. If your partner is pregnant, it is recommended you consider using condoms or avoid having sex for the duration of the pregnancy until more is known.
- Avoid donating blood for 3 weeks after returning from travel to a Zika infected area. Although the risk is low, Canadian Blood Services has implemented a 21-day waiting period to prevent possible transmission.

### **Are there tests for the Zika Virus?**

Testing for Zika virus is currently being carried out at the B. C. Centre for Disease Control Public Health Laboratory and the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Testing can be arranged through your doctor. Babies can be assessed to ensure that they are developing normally through fetal ultrasound scans, which can also be arranged through your doctor.

### **Useful Websites**

#### **BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)**

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) is an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. They provide provincial and national leadership in public health through surveillance, detection, prevention and consultation. They also provide direct diagnostic and treatment services to people with diseases that may affect the health of the public. To learn more about Zika virus and the risk in B.C., click on the link below.

- [Zika Virus](#)

#### **Government of Canada**

The Government of Canada website provides health and safety information for Canadians and health professionals. For more information about the Zika virus, including the risk and advice for Canadians, click on the link below.

- [Zika Virus](#)

## World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides leadership on global health matters, including monitoring and assessing health issues such as Zika virus, providing technical support to countries, and setting norms and standards. For more information about Zika virus, including updates on which countries are affected, click on the link below.

- [Zika virus](#)

### Updated: September, 2019

The information provided in the Zika Virus Health Feature has been adapted from the [Government of Canada: Zika virus](#), accessed July 3, 2019, the [BCCDC: Zika Virus](#), accessed July 3, 2019, and the [World Health Organization: Zika virus](#), accessed July 3, 2019.