



Zika Questions and Answers

Updated March 4, 2016

What is Zika?

Zika is an infectious disease caused by the Zika virus, which is transmitted to people by *Aedes* mosquitoes. Symptoms of Zika typically include fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes.

Where does Zika occur?

Zika occurs in many tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and islands in the Pacific Ocean. Recent outbreaks have occurred in [the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico](#). Please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/> for the latest information on where Zika virus is circulating.

How do people get Zika?

Zika virus is primarily transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes (also known as yellow fever mosquitoes) and by *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes (also known as Asian tiger mosquitoes). These mosquitoes are not native to California. However, since 2011 they have been detected in [several California counties](#). An *Aedes* mosquito can only transmit Zika virus after it bites a person who has this virus in their blood. Thus far in California, Zika virus infections have been documented only in a few people who were infected while traveling outside the United States. Zika virus is not spread through casual contact such as touching or hugging an infected person.

What are the symptoms of Zika?

Most people infected with Zika virus have no symptoms. If symptoms develop, the most common are fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes. Symptoms usually begin a few days to a week after being bitten by an infected mosquito. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. There are other causes of fever and painful joints. If you have recently traveled to an area where Zika virus is present and you have these symptoms, your healthcare provider can order different tests to help determine the cause.

What's the relationship between Zika virus and microcephaly in newborns?

There is a possible association between Zika and [microcephaly](#) (abnormally small head and brain) in newborns. It is suspected that pregnant women who get infected with Zika virus may pass the virus to the developing fetus. However, there are many causes of microcephaly in babies, and whether Zika virus infection causes microcephaly has not been confirmed. Studies are underway to better understand this possible relationship.

Until more is known, and out of an abundance of caution, the California Department of Public Health recommends special [travel precautions for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant](#):

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
- Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas should talk to their healthcare provider first and strictly follow [steps to avoid mosquito bites](#) during the trip.
- Because sexual transmission of Zika is possible, if a couple is planning a pregnancy and must travel to ones of these areas, *both* partners should strictly follow [steps to prevent mosquito bites](#) during the trip.
- Pregnant women who traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission should be evaluated for Zika virus infection if they had any symptoms suggestive of Zika or if their baby has evidence of microcephaly. Other mosquito-borne virus infections, such



as dengue and chikungunya, should be ruled out in these patients.

- Pregnant women who traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission but have *not* had symptoms may be offered Zika virus testing from 2 to 12 weeks after travel.
- Pregnant women whose male partners have or are at risk for Zika virus infection (e.g., travel to areas with Zika virus transmission), should consider using condoms or abstaining from sex during the course of pregnancy since the virus has been found in the semen of infected men.
- Women of reproductive age who are traveling to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing and who want to avoid pregnancy during the time they are traveling should talk to their health care provider to discuss effective strategies to prevent unintended pregnancy.

Is Zika a sexually transmitted infection?

Spread of Zika virus through sexual contact has been reported in infected men to their sexual partners, although there is limited data about the risk. It is not clear how frequently Zika virus is transmitted through sex and how long infected persons might be infectious. The risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by correct and consistent use of condoms.

What are the recommendations for women who have recently traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission who plan to become pregnant?

It is unknown when is a safe time to become pregnant after Zika virus infection or possible exposure to Zika virus. It is recommended that women speak to their health care provider about their plans. There is no current evidence to suggest that a baby conceived after the mother's infection has resolved would be at risk for infection to her baby. This is because the Zika virus only stays in the mother's blood for about one week. However, if a couple planning to become pregnant recently traveled together, they must keep in mind that sexual transmission of Zika virus is possible from a man to a woman and it is not clear how long a man might be infectious. This is an important consideration if a couple plans to become pregnant.

What if a man traveled to a region with ongoing Zika virus transmission? How long should he and his partner wait before trying to become pregnant?

Sexual transmission of Zika virus has been reported, but it is not known for how long a man infected with Zika virus can spread the virus to sexual partners through his semen. Therefore, for a woman whose sexual partner has traveled to areas with active Zika virus transmission, it is unknown how long she should wait before trying to get pregnant. There is currently no test to determine the risk of sexual transmission of Zika virus from infected men to their sexual partners.

What's the relationship between Zika virus and Guillain-Barré Syndrome?

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare autoimmune disease affecting the nervous system leading to muscle weakness and possible paralysis. While most people recover from GBS, some people have permanent damage and in rare cases, people have died. Cases of GBS were reported among some persons with Zika in the French Polynesia Zika outbreak in 2013-2014, and an increase of GBS cases has recently been noted in some South American countries where Zika outbreaks are ongoing. Whether Zika virus infection and GBS are related is still not clear and is being investigated.

How is Zika treated?

There is no specific treatment for Zika. Talk with your health care provider about medications to help reduce fever and pain; rest and fluids are also helpful. Most people will feel better in about a week.



What can people do to keep from getting Zika?

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. In areas where Zika is present, everyone, including pregnant women and women of childbearing age, should protect themselves from mosquito bites.

- Mosquito repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus should be applied to exposed skin and clothing.
- **Using insect repellent is safe and effective. Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding can and should choose an EPA-registered insect repellent and use it according to the product label.**
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If you are not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes inside your home or hotel, sleep under a mosquito bed net.

Because of the potential transmission of Zika virus through sex, the risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by correct and consistent use of condoms. Men who have traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission and have a pregnant partner should abstain from sexual activity or use condoms consistently and correctly during sex while their partner is pregnant.

What can people do to help prevent Zika from becoming established in California?

- If you are sick with fever, rash, red eyes, or joint pain within two weeks after returning from an area where Zika occurs, contact your healthcare provider and avoid mosquito bites to help prevent possible spread of the virus.
- To reduce mosquito breeding, check your yard often for water-filled containers. Clean and scrub bird baths and pet-watering dishes weekly and dump the water from overflow dishes under potted plants and flower pots. Check that gutters are not holding water.
- Contact your local vector control agency if you detect unusual numbers of mosquitoes or you are being bitten during the day.

Can I donate blood if I recently traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission?

Spread of Zika virus through blood transfusion has been reported. Therefore, the American Red Cross has asked blood donors to wait 28 days after returning from an area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing before they donate blood. Additionally, blood donors must immediately report any signs of illness to the Red Cross within 14 days of donation.

Is Zika virus transmitted in health care facilities?

Zika virus is not known to be transmitted in health care facilities, and the risk for healthcare-associated infections with Zika virus is low. Standard Precautions as currently practiced in healthcare facilities are appropriate infection control measures to prevent transmission of Zika virus to healthcare workers and other patients.

Can animals spread Zika virus?

There is no evidence that Zika virus is spread to people from contact with animals. Zika virus is transmitted to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. Other than humans, the only animals known to be infected with Zika virus are monkeys and apes.

What is CDPH doing about Zika virus?

CDPH has taken a multi-pronged approach to Zika virus disease awareness and prevention. CDPH has released a health advisory on Zika virus, as well as a news release advising the public to guard against mosquito bites. CDPH has maintained communication with local health departments to share Zika virus information and national recommendations from the CDC. CDPH



works with local health departments to conduct ongoing surveillance for human cases of Zika virus disease, as well as dengue and chikungunya (all transmitted by *Aedes* mosquitoes). CDPH also works with local vector control agencies to address the spread of *Aedes* mosquitoes in California. CDPH has been working with local health departments to transmit specimens for Zika virus testing to CDC. The CDPH laboratory can now do some Zika virus testing and can also test for dengue and chikungunya viruses. CDPH communicates any developing information and recommendations to all local partners as they become available.

Where can I find more information about Zika?

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>

California Department of Public Health:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Zika.aspx>