

# Zika Virus

## What is Zika virus?

Zika is a virus (germ) spread by certain kinds of mosquitoes. Most people (80%) who are exposed to Zika virus will not get sick. If they do get sick, symptoms usually start 2-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and may include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). However, if infection occurs when a woman is pregnant, the infection can sometimes spread to the developing fetus.

## How is Zika spread?

Zika virus is usually spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. The virus can also be spread from a man to his sexual partner during unprotected sexual contact and from a pregnant woman to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. There is also concern that Zika virus could be transmitted through blood transfusion from an infected donor. Virus has also been found in breast milk, urine and saliva but transmission potential from these sources is still being investigated.

Although Zika virus has been known to cause infection in people in Africa and Asia since the 1950s, outbreaks of Zika infection have occurred in areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands only more recently. During 2015, Zika virus was found in South America for the first time. Since then, it has spread to many countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean and some of the Pacific Islands, resulting in a very large outbreak of public health concern.

## Can I get Zika virus from mosquitoes in Massachusetts?

It is extremely unlikely that anyone could become infected with Zika virus from a mosquito bite in Massachusetts. The kinds of mosquitoes that are known to carry Zika virus are generally not found in Massachusetts.

However, travelers to affected areas may be bitten by infected mosquitoes during their trip and some of these travelers are being diagnosed with Zika virus disease when they return to the United States.

## What is the risk from Zika virus infection if I am pregnant?

In pregnant women who become infected with Zika virus, it is possible for the virus to spread to the developing fetus. When this happens, it can result in birth defects, including abnormal brain and head development (microcephaly). If you are pregnant, and you or your male partner have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission, you should discuss testing with your doctor or other healthcare provider. Zika virus testing of pregnant women is available at the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory.

## What is the risk from Zika virus infection if I am not a pregnant woman?

Most people (80%) who are exposed to Zika virus will not get sick. If they do get sick, symptoms usually start 2-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and may include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). There have been reports of some immune system disorders, such as Guillain-Barré syndrome, following Zika virus infection; this happens rarely and can also happen following other types of infections.



## Am I at risk for Zika virus?

At this time, only people traveling to places with ongoing Zika virus outbreaks or engaging in sexual activity with someone who has traveled to these places are at risk for getting the infection. If you or your partner is planning on traveling, you should check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for information about where Zika virus is occurring: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>.

## If I am pregnant, how should I protect myself from Zika virus disease?

**Until more is known, pregnant women and couples trying to become pregnant should postpone travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.** Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their doctor or other healthcare provider first and take great care to avoid mosquito bites during the trip. Further travel advice for pregnant women is available at this CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/zika-pregnancytravel.pdf>.

Since Zika virus can also be spread by a man to his sexual partner, if your male partner has traveled to an area with ongoing Zika outbreak you should use condoms correctly and consistently every time while engaging in any form of sexual activity OR not have sex during the pregnancy.

## Should I wait before trying to get pregnant?

If you are trying to become pregnant and have potentially been exposed to Zika virus through travel or sexual activity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has provided suggested time periods to wait before trying to become pregnant. **You should consult with your doctor or other healthcare provider for more information.**

	Women	Men
Zika symptoms	Wait at least 8 weeks after symptoms start	Wait at least 6 months after symptoms start
No Zika symptoms	Wait at least 8 weeks after exposure	Wait at least 8 weeks after exposure

**Note:** These recommendations are current as of May 2, 2016 and are subject to change. Remember to check [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika) or talk with your healthcare provider for the most current information.

## Is there any treatment for Zika virus?

There is no specific treatment for Zika virus infections, but most people do not become seriously ill and recover quickly. If you are pregnant and are bitten by mosquitoes while traveling in an area with Zika virus or had sexual contact without a condom with a male partner who has traveled there, you should contact your prenatal care provider.

Zika virus testing is available and recommended for pregnant women with possible Zika virus exposure. If testing confirms that she was exposed to Zika virus, her prenatal care provider may make recommendations for additional monitoring of the woman and her developing fetus.



## What can you do to protect yourself from Zika virus while you are traveling?

Since Zika virus is spread by infected mosquitoes, here are some things you can do to reduce your chances of being bitten **when you are traveling in an area with Zika virus**:

- When you are outdoors, wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and socks. This may be difficult to do when the weather is hot, but it will help keep mosquitoes away from your skin.
- Try to stay in places that use air conditioning or window and door screens. Sleep under a mosquito bed net if air conditioned or screened rooms are not available or if you are sleeping outdoors.
- Use a repellent with **DEET** (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), **permethrin**, **picaridin** (KBR 3023), **IR3535** (3-[N-butyl-N-acetyl]-aminopropionic acid) or **oil of lemon eucalyptus** [p-menthane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] according to the instructions on the product label.
  - **When used as directed on the product label, insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, and IR3535 are safe for pregnant women.**
  - If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen prior to using repellent.
  - DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children.
  - Oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years of age.
  - Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear and should not be applied to skin.
  - More information on choosing and using repellents safely is included in the MDPH Mosquito Repellents fact sheet which can be viewed online at [www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito](http://www.mass.gov/dph/mosquito).
  - If you can't go online, contact MDPH at (617) 983-6800 for a hard copy.
- Unlike mosquito-borne illness here in Massachusetts, Zika virus is spread by mosquitoes that bite during the day. This means that when traveling in an area with Zika virus activity, it is especially important to take these steps to prevent mosquito bites during daytime hours as well as between dusk and dawn.

## Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse, or health care clinic, or your local board of health (listed in the telephone directory under Local Government).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850, or on the MDPH Zika virus website at [www.mass.gov/dph/zika](http://www.mass.gov/dph/zika).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Zika virus website at [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika).
- Health effects of repellents: MDPH Bureau of Environmental Health at 617-624-5757.

