

## Zika Virus

### What is the Zika virus?

The Zika virus is an arbovirus transmitted by mosquitoes. The Zika virus is thought to be linked to a rise in the cases of a birth defect called microcephaly. This defect leaves a baby with an abnormally small head and a shorter life expectancy. The baby's brain is also small and is not completely developed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) performed lab tests that suggest a link between the Zika virus and some of the more than 3,500 babies born in Brazil with microcephaly in 2015. The CDC is advising women who are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant to avoid going to countries in South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, where the virus is rapidly spreading.

### What causes the Zika virus?

The Zika virus is spread by mosquito bites from infected mosquitoes. In most cases, these mosquitoes are found in tropical regions.

### What are the symptoms of the Zika virus?

Symptoms usually are mild, and include:

- Fever
- Skin rashes
- Conjunctivitis (pinkeye)
- Headaches
- Pain in the muscles and joints

### How is the Zika virus treated?

Currently, there is no vaccine for the virus. The CDC recommends supportive care. If a person is sick with the Zika virus, he or she should drink lots of fluids, rest, and take medicine (Tylenol) for pain and fever. A person with the virus should see a doctor if symptoms get worse.

### How can the Zika virus be prevented?

It is important to avoid mosquito bites. Insect repellents and public mosquito control measures can help cut down on the number of mosquitoes present.

- Cover any exposed skin, preferably with material that is light in color. Be sure to protect children and those who are not able to cover their skin themselves.
- Treat clothing, shoes, and other items with an insecticide such as permethrin.
- Reduce contact with mosquitoes by using mosquito nets (preferably treated with permethrin) and screens and by closing doors and windows.
- Make sure that there is no standing water in items such as buckets or flower pots. Mosquitoes breed in areas where there is standing water.

In addition, pregnant women or couples who are trying to have a baby should not have sex, or should use a condom, if their partner has travelled to a Zika zone in the last three months. The partner should be tested for the Zika virus.

## References

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