

# HealthAlert Zika Virus Disease

**Z**ika is a viral disease spread most commonly by *Aedes* species mosquitoes. An infection with Zika virus usually causes very mild symptoms, but can cause serious birth defects in women who contract the infection while pregnant. Although *Aedes* mosquitoes are not native to California, invasive species have recently been found in several California cities.

This has the potential to spread into other areas within the region. Take special precaution while travelling for research projects, participating in study programs abroad, and vacationing in areas where *Aedes* mosquitoes are native. *Aedes* species mosquitoes are most active and bite during the day, but they can also bite at night.



*Aedes aegypti*

## HOW IS ZIKA SPREAD?

Zika is mainly spread by the bite of infected *Aedes aegypti* or *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes, both of which have been found throughout the U.S. and California. Zika can also be transmitted through unprotected sexual contact and possibly contact with infected human blood.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A ZIKA VIRUS INFECTION?

Most people who contract an infection have no symptoms. 20% of infected persons develop symptoms including fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes within two weeks following the mosquito bite. Symptoms can last for several days to a week. Some reports link Zika to Guillain-Barré Syndrome, which causes nerve damage, but the connection has not been confirmed.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I'M INFECTED?

If you are experiencing symptoms after returning from a Zika hotspot, contact USC Student Health (or your healthcare provider) and inform them of your recent trip. If you are infected with Zika virus, you can also pass on the virus if an uninfected mosquito bites you. Stop the spread of the virus by practicing mosquito bite control (see "What You Can Do" inset) and avoiding areas where mosquitoes are present.

## CAN ZIKA BE PREVENTED OR TREATED?

There is no vaccine to prevent an infection with Zika virus, but plenty of rest and fluids can help alleviate the symptoms. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and use an EPA-registered insect repellent to protect yourself. As Zika can also be transmitted via sexual contact or contact with human blood, it is recommended that condoms be used if you or your partner may have had exposure to Zika virus. Zika can be transmitted in semen for several months after exposure. Additionally, blood should not be donated for a month following an exposure.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Cover up.** Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants. Treat your clothes with permethrin or another EPA-registered repellent.
- **Use insect repellent.** When used as directed, EPA-registered insect repellents are proven to be safe and effective.
- **Use screens or nets.** Keep mosquitoes out by using door and window screens or bed nets if screens are not installed.
- **Use condoms.** If you or your partner may have had exposure to Zika, use condoms during sex or abstain from sexual activity for at least three months.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I'M PREGNANT?

An infection with Zika virus during pregnancy can cause the fetus to develop microcephaly (small head and brain) in addition to other serious birth defects that may involve the eyes, brain, or hearing ability. Due to the severity of the birth defects caused by Zika, the CDC recommends that pregnant women avoid travelling to areas where this disease occurs. Contact your healthcare provider if you have any concerns.

## WHAT SHOULD I KNOW BEFORE TRAVELLING?

Many areas around the world have recorded incidents and outbreaks of Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases such as Chikungunya, Dengue, and Malaria. Research your travel destination(s), talk to your healthcare provider about possible prophylactic treatments and vaccinations, and always bring EPA-registered insect repellents with you in case effective repellents are not available at your travel destination(s).

## REFERENCES

- [Zika Virus Information](#)
- [How Zika Virus Spreads](#)
- [Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus Mosquitoes](#)
- [Mosquito Bite Prevention](#)
- [EPA Registered Insect Repellents](#)
- [Travelers' Health Website](#)