FACT SHEET: ZIKA

May 2025

WHAT IS ZIKA?

Zika is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause serious birth defects. It is transmitted through the bite of an Aedes species mosquito and is primarily found in tropical and subtropical areas of Africa, the Americas, Southern Asia, and the Western Pacific.

WHO CAN GET ZIKA?

Anyone can get Zika. Travelers to areas with active Zika virus transmission have been the primary source of cases in the continental United States.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ZIKA?

Many people infected with the Zika virus will either be asymptomatic or experience very mild symptoms. The most typical signs of infection include:

- Fever
- Rash
- Headache
- Joint pain
- Red eyes, or conjunctivitis
- Muscle pain

Babies born to mothers who were infected with Zika virus during pregnancy may experience birth defects, such as smaller than expected head size (microcephaly); problems with hearing, vision, brain development, and feeding; seizures; stiff muscles; and decreased joint movement. Some babies who look healthy at birth can develop long-term health problems.

HOW IS ZIKA SPREAD?

Zika virus is spread primarily by the bite of an Aedes species mosquito. It can also be transferred from a pregnant person to their fetus, which can cause birth defects such as microcephaly, or through sex. Rarely, the Zika virus can spread in lab settings and through contaminated blood or tissues. Transmission from a person can occur before, during, or after the development of symptoms.

IS A PERSON WITH ZIKA CONTAGIOUS?

Zika can be transmitted from a pregnant person to their fetus and from person-to-person during sex.

HOW IS ZIKA TREATED AND IS THERE A VACCINE?

There is no specific treatment for Zika, but symptoms can be clinically managed. Those experiencing symptoms of Zika should seek medical care. Symptom management includes:

- Rest
- Consuming liquids to remain hydrated
- Using an over-the-counter medication to treat pain and fever, such as acetaminophen

There is currently no vaccine to prevent Zika.

CAN ZIKA BE PREVENTED?

Avoiding mosquito bites is the best way to prevent Zika infection. This can be achieved by:

- Using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellents
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors
- Sleeping under a mosquito net
- Using air conditioning if possible, keeping windows and doors closed
- Installing screens on doors and windows
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items
- Condom use can also help prevent Zika transmission through sex.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about Zika and other related health topics can be found at cdc.gov. Before traveling, visit CDC's Travelers' Health website for any active Travel Health Notices related to Zika. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit dchealth.dc.gov or call (202) 442-5865.

DC HEALTH | Center for Policy, Planning and Evaluation
Division of Epidemiology — Disease Surveillance and Investigation
2201 Shannon Place SE, 6th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20020
dchealth.dc.gov | (202) 442-5865

DC HEALTH
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA