

# Zika Virus

## Zika Disease

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### What is Zika?

Zika is a disease caused by Zika virus that is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. People usually don't get sick enough to go to a hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika.

### Who is at risk of being infected?

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found who has not already been infected with Zika virus is at risk for infection. Information on areas with Zika virus transmission can be found on the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) website:

[cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html).

In some cases, infection has been transmitted through blood transfusion or sexual contact with an infected person.

### How is Zika virus transmitted?

The Zika virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes, the same mosquitoes that spread Chikungunya and dengue. These mosquitoes are aggressive daytime biters, and they can also bite at night. Mosquitoes can become infected when they bite a person already infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites. It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother to her baby in utero during pregnancy or around the time of birth. The virus can also be spread through contact with an infected person's blood (such as through a blood transfusion, though this is unlikely in the United States) or through sexual contact.

### What are the symptoms of Zika?

About one in five people infected with Zika will get sick. For people who get sick, the illness is usually mild. For this reason, many people might not realize they have been infected. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Symptoms typically begin two to seven days after exposure (such as being bitten by an infected mosquito).

### What countries have Zika virus?

Local transmission of Zika virus has been reported in many countries and territories. Specific areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are likely to change over time. If traveling, please visit the CDC Travelers' Health site ([cdc.gov/travel/notices/](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/notices/)) for the most updated travel information.

### Should we be concerned about Zika in Spokane or Washington state?

Zika virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. These mosquitoes are not found in the Pacific Northwest and local transmission is not anticipated. However, travelers who visit an area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing could become infected if bitten by a mosquito. Large-scale outbreaks in the United States are unlikely due to varying factors including good mosquito control programs, frequent availability of air conditioning (limiting mosquitos' ability to enter indoors), and access to insect repellants.

### How is Zika diagnosed?

See your healthcare provider if you develop symptoms (fever, rash, joint pain, red eyes). If you have recently traveled, tell your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider may order blood tests to look for Zika or other similar viral diseases like dengue or chikungunya.

### Is there a vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika?

No. There is no vaccine to prevent infection or medicine to treat Zika.

### What should I do if I have Zika?

Treat the symptoms by getting plenty of rest, drink fluids to prevent dehydration, take medicine such as acetaminophen to reduce fever and pain, and **do not** take aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. Aleve, ibuprofen, Naprosyn, etc.).

During the first week of infection, Zika virus can be found in the blood and passed from an infected person to another person through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people. To help prevent others from getting sick, avoid mosquito bites during the first week of illness (note: the types of mosquitoes that transmit Zika virus are not found in the Northwest).

See your healthcare provider if you are pregnant and traveled to a [country where Zika cases have been reported](#) either during your pregnancy or in the eight weeks prior to conception, even if you have no symptoms. This is also important if you are pregnant and your sexual partner traveled to an affected area either during your pregnancy or in the three months prior to conception. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider where you traveled. There are tests that can be done for Zika infection for at risk pregnant women.

## Does Zika in pregnant women cause birth defects?

Zika infection during pregnancy can cause a serious birth defect called microcephaly that is a sign of incomplete brain development. Doctors have also found other problems in pregnancies and among fetuses and infants infected with Zika virus before birth. Knowledge of the link between Zika virus and these outcomes is evolving, but until more is known, CDC recommends special precautions for the following groups:

- Women who are pregnant (in any trimester):
  - Pregnant women should not travel to any area where a [Zika outbreak is occurring](#).
    - If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your doctor first, and strictly follow [steps to prevent mosquito bites](#) during your trip.
    - Pregnant women should carefully consider risks and possible consequences of travel to [areas with risk of Zika](#).
- Women who are trying to become pregnant:
  - Before you travel, talk to your doctor about your plans to become pregnant and the risk of Zika.
  - Strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.
  - Consider waiting to become pregnant:
    - The couple should use condoms or not have sex for at least three months after the male partner returns.
    - The couple should use condoms or not have sex for at least two months after the female partner returns.

For more questions and answers on Zika and pregnancy, see [cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/index.html).

## What should a pregnant woman do if she has previously traveled to a place with a Zika outbreak?

Pregnant women who have recently traveled or have sexual partners who have traveled to an area with Zika, should talk to a healthcare provider about their travel even if they don't feel sick. CDC recommends that all pregnant women who have traveled to an area with Zika talk to their doctor. It is especially important that pregnant women see a doctor if they develop a fever, rash, joint pain, or red eyes during their trip or within two weeks after traveling to a country where Zika has been reported. They should tell the doctor where they traveled.

If a pregnant woman's partner(s) has traveled to an area with risk of Zika, it's important to not have sex or to use condoms correctly and consistently, for at least three months after a male partner returns, and two months for a female partner.

## Is it safe to get pregnant after traveling to a place with a Zika outbreak?

Women thinking about getting pregnant who have recently traveled to an area with Zika should talk to their healthcare

provider. Once a person becomes sick, Zika virus usually remains in the blood for about a week. Zika virus has been found in semen for much longer. Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that Zika virus, after it is cleared from the blood, poses a risk of birth defects for future pregnancies. However, women should wait at least eight weeks before attempting conception after travel to an affected area, and three months if their partner traveled (this is due to the potentially longer duration for Zika virus to be found in semen).

## Is Zika transmitted through sex?

Zika virus can be spread by men and women to their sex partners, and the virus can be present in semen longer than in blood.

It is unknown how long the virus is present in semen or vaginal fluids. Because of the link between Zika and birth defects, men who have traveled to an [area where there is ongoing transmission](#) of Zika virus should abstain from sex with pregnant partners or partners who could become pregnant, or should use condoms consistently and correctly for at least three months after their return.

## Does Zika cause Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)?

Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) is a rare disorder where a person's own immune system damages the nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. These symptoms can last a few weeks or a few months. The Brazil Ministry of Health reported an increased number of people affected with GBS during the country's Zika outbreak; however, we do not know if Zika causes GBS, and research into this association is ongoing.

## What can people do to prevent becoming infected with Zika virus?

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. The best way to prevent diseases spread by mosquitoes is to avoid being bitten when traveling to or living in countries with ongoing Zika virus transmission. Protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites. Here's how:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents. All EPA-registered insect repellents are evaluated for effectiveness.
  - Always follow the product label instructions.
  - Reapply insect repellent as directed.
  - Do not spray repellent on the skin under clothing.
  - If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent.

- If you have a baby or child:
  - Do not use insect repellent on babies younger than two months of age.
  - Dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs.
  - Cover crib, stroller, and baby carrier with mosquito netting.
  - Do not apply insect repellent onto a child's hands, eyes, mouth, and cut or irritated skin.
- Adults: Spray insect repellent onto your hands and then apply to a child's face. Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items.
  - Treated clothing remains protective after multiple washings. See product information to learn how long the protection will last.
  - If treating items yourself, follow the product instructions carefully.
  - Do NOT use permethrin products directly on skin. They are intended to treat clothing.
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net if you are overseas or outside and are not able to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

Individuals should use condoms if concerned about transmission from sexual contact with an infected person.

### **For more information:**

#### **Spokane Regional Health District**

Disease Prevention and Response

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