

Zika Questions and Answers

Updated October 2018

What is Zika?

Zika is an infectious disease caused by the Zika virus, which is primarily transmitted to people by *Aedes* mosquitoes. Symptoms of Zika typically include fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes.

Where does Zika occur?

Zika occurs in many tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and islands in the Pacific Ocean. Recent outbreaks have occurred in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico. Additionally, local transmission has been documented in the United States in Florida and Texas. Please visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Zika virus case reporting website](http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/) (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/>) for the latest information on where Zika virus is circulating. Within the Zika-affected countries, travel to elevations higher than 6,500 feet (2000 meters) is considered to pose minimal risk.

How do people get Zika?

1. From mosquitoes. Zika virus is primarily transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes (also known as yellow fever mosquitoes) and by *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes (also known as Asian tiger mosquitoes). These mosquitoes are not native to California. However, since 2011 they have been detected in [several California counties](#). An *Aedes* mosquito can only transmit Zika virus after it bites a person who has this virus in their blood.
2. Through unprotected sex. Persons with Zika virus infection may transmit Zika virus to their sexual partners. The CDC recommends that to prevent possible sexual transmission, men who have been exposed to Zika abstain from sex or use condoms for at least 3 months following exposure. Women should abstain or use condoms for at least 2 months following exposure.
3. Through blood transfusion. California blood centers now screen blood for Zika virus, so Zika virus transmission through blood transfusion is unlikely.
4. From an infected mother to her fetus.

To date there has been no local mosquito-borne transmission of Zika in California. Thus far, Zika virus infections in California have been documented only in people who were infected while traveling outside the state, through sexual contact with an infected traveler, or through infection from mother to fetus. Zika virus is not spread through casual contact. However, persons caring for someone with Zika virus disease should use standard precautions (such as gloves and gowns) to prevent contact with blood or other body fluids.

What are the symptoms of Zika?

Most people infected with Zika virus have no symptoms. If symptoms develop, the most common are fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes. Symptoms usually begin a few days to a week after being bitten by an infected mosquito or having unprotected sex with an infected partner. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. There are other causes of fever and painful joints. If you have recently traveled to an

area where Zika virus is present or have recently had unprotected sex with an infected partner and you have these symptoms, your healthcare provider can order Zika and other tests to help determine the cause.

How is Zika treated?

There is no specific treatment for Zika. Talk with your health care provider about medications to help reduce fever and pain; rest and fluids are also helpful. Most people will feel better in about a week.

What's the relationship between Zika virus and microcephaly in newborns?

Zika virus infection in pregnant women can cause [microcephaly](#) (abnormally small head and brain) and other serious nervous system abnormalities in newborns. This can happen after a pregnant woman infected with Zika virus passes the virus to her developing fetus. However, many babies born to women infected with Zika virus during pregnancy do not have microcephaly. There are still many unknowns about the relationship between Zika virus and microcephaly, such as what percentage of pregnant women infected with Zika virus will have a baby with microcephaly. Studies are underway to better understand the consequences of Zika virus infection in pregnant women.

Until more is known, and out of an abundance of caution, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends special [travel precautions for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant](#):

- Pregnant women in any trimester and women planning to become pregnant should not travel to areas where there is a risk for Zika virus infection.
- Pregnant women who must travel to an area with risk for Zika should talk to their health care provider first and strictly follow [steps to avoid mosquito bites](#) during the trip.
- Because sexual transmission of Zika is possible, if a couple is planning a pregnancy or is already pregnant and must travel to an area with Zika, *both* partners should strictly follow [steps to prevent mosquito bites](#) during the trip.
- Pregnant women who have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission and have symptoms of Zika should be evaluated for Zika virus infection. Other mosquito-borne virus infections, such as dengue and chikungunya, should be ruled out in these patients.
- Pregnant women who have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission but do **not** have symptoms of Zika should *not* be routinely tested for infection. Instead, asymptomatic pregnant women should be assessed carefully for factors that increase the likelihood of Zika infection. Pregnant women without symptoms but who have ongoing possible Zika virus exposure (through travel or sex) should be evaluated for infection during the pregnancy.
- Pregnant women whose sexual partners have had or are at risk for Zika virus infection (e.g., travel to areas with risk of Zika virus transmission), should use condoms or abstain from sex for the duration of the pregnancy.
- Women of reproductive age who are traveling to areas with risk of Zika virus transmission and who want to avoid pregnancy during the time they are traveling should talk to their health care provider to discuss effective strategies to prevent unintended pregnancy.

How are local health departments and CDPH keeping track of pregnant women diagnosed with Zika virus disease?

Local health departments and CDPH are working together to actively monitor cases of pregnant women diagnosed with Zika virus disease. For infants born to Zika-affected mothers, health care providers monitor the child's health over time and local health departments and other agencies provide assistance and referrals for additional medical care, early intervention services, and social support to the family, as needed.

Is Zika a sexually transmitted infection?

Spread of Zika virus through sexual contact has been reported from infected persons to their sexual partners. The risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by the correct and consistent use of condoms (male or female). CDC guidelines currently recommend the following:

- All men with possible Zika virus exposure should use condoms or abstain from sex for at least 3 months, regardless of symptom status.
- All women with possible Zika virus exposure should use condoms or abstain from sex for at least 2 months, regardless of symptom status.

There is currently no test to determine the risk of sexual transmission of Zika virus from infected persons to their sexual partners.

What are the recommendations for women who have recently traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission who plan to become pregnant?

CDC guidelines currently recommend that women who have recently traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission should wait at least 2 months after returning from travel before trying to become pregnant, regardless of symptom status. Women should also speak to their health care provider about their plans. There is no current evidence to suggest that a baby conceived after the mother's infection has resolved would be at risk for Zika infection. This is because the Zika virus only stays in the mother's blood for about one week. If a couple planning to become pregnant recently traveled together, they must keep in mind that sexual transmission of Zika virus is possible. This is an important consideration if a couple plans to become pregnant.

What if a man traveled to a region with ongoing Zika virus transmission? How long should he and his partner wait before trying to become pregnant?

Sexual transmission of Zika virus has been reported, but it is not known for exactly how long a person infected with Zika virus can spread the virus to sexual partners. CDC guidelines currently recommend that all men with possible Zika virus exposure who are considering attempting conception with their partner, regardless of symptom status, wait to conceive until at least 3 months after symptom onset (if symptomatic) or last possible Zika virus exposure (if asymptomatic).

What's the relationship between Zika virus and Guillain-Barré Syndrome?

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare autoimmune disease affecting the nervous system leading to muscle weakness and possible paralysis. While most people recover from GBS, some people have permanent damage and in rare cases, people have died. There is a growing association between GBS and Zika. Cases of GBS were reported among some persons with Zika in the French Polynesia Zika outbreak in 2013-2014, and an increase of GBS cases has recently been noted in some South American countries where Zika outbreaks are ongoing. Studies are ongoing to better understand the type of

GBS that is apparently associated with Zika.

What can people do to keep from getting Zika?

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. In areas where Zika is present, everyone, including pregnant women and women of childbearing age, should protect themselves from mosquito bites.

- Apply EPA-registered mosquito repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or para-menthane-diol to exposed skin and clothing.
- **Using insect repellent is safe and effective. Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding can and should use an EPA-registered insect repellent according to the product label.**
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If you are not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes inside your home or hotel, sleep under a mosquito bed net.

Because Zika virus can be transmitted through sex, the risk of spreading the virus to sexual partners can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by correct and consistent use of condoms (male or female). Both asymptomatic and symptomatic men and women who have traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission and have a pregnant partner should abstain from sexual activity or use condoms consistently and correctly during sex for the duration of the pregnancy.

What can people do to help prevent Zika from becoming established in California?

- All travelers returning from an area with Zika to California should take steps to prevent mosquito bites for 3 weeks so they do not spread Zika to uninfected mosquitoes, even if the travelers do not feel sick. Travelers can consider abstaining from sex or using condoms consistently and correctly after returning from travel. (See above for more information.)
- If you are sick with fever, rash, red eyes, or joint pain within two weeks after returning from an area where Zika occurs, contact your healthcare provider and continue to avoid mosquito bites to help prevent possible spread of the virus.
- To reduce mosquito breeding, check your yard often for water-filled containers. Clean and scrub bird baths and pet-watering dishes weekly and dump the water from overflow dishes under potted plants and flower pots. Check that gutters are not holding water.
- Contact your local vector control agency if you detect unusual numbers of mosquitoes or you are being bitten during the day.

Can I donate blood if I recently traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission?

Spread of Zika virus through blood transfusion has been reported. Therefore, the [American Red Cross](#) has asked blood donors to wait 4 weeks (28 days) after risk of exposure to Zika virus before they donate blood. However, California blood centers now screen blood for Zika virus.

Is Zika virus transmitted in health care facilities?

Zika virus is not known to be transmitted in health care facilities, and the risk for healthcare-associated infections with Zika virus is low. Standard Precautions as currently

practiced in healthcare facilities are appropriate infection control measures to prevent transmission of Zika virus to healthcare workers and other patients.

Can animals spread Zika virus?

There is no evidence that Zika virus is spread to people from contact with animals. Zika virus is transmitted to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. Other than humans, the only animals known to be infected with Zika virus are monkeys and apes.

What is CDPH doing about Zika virus?

CDPH has taken a multi-pronged approach to Zika virus disease awareness and prevention. CDPH has released a health advisory on Zika virus, as well as a news release advising the public to guard against mosquito bites. CDPH has maintained communication with local health departments to share Zika virus information and national recommendations from the CDC. CDPH works with local health departments to conduct ongoing surveillance for human cases of Zika virus disease, as well as dengue and chikungunya (all transmitted by *Aedes* mosquitoes). CDPH also works with local vector control agencies to address the spread of *Aedes* mosquitoes in California. CDPH has been working with local health departments to transfer specimens for Zika virus testing to CDC. The CDPH laboratory can perform Zika virus testing and can also test for dengue and chikungunya viruses. CDPH communicates any developing information and recommendations to all local partners as they become available.

Where can I find more information about Zika?

Visit the [CDC Zika virus website](http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>).

Visit the [California Department of Public Health Zika virus website](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Zika) (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Zika>).