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Zika virus: How to keep your family safe

Mosquitoes are more than just an itchy nuisance. They can also pass on diseases. One of those diseases is Zika. You can take steps to help protect yourself, your family and your community from Zika.

What is Zika?



Zika is a disease caused by a virus. It's mainly spread to people by mosquitoes. When an infected mosquito bites you, it can pass on the virus and make you sick.

Zika illness is usually very mild. You may get symptoms such as a rash, fever, red eyes or joint pain, which usually go away within a week. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 20 percent of people who are infected with Zika will get sick.

Some reports link Zika to Guillain-Barré, a rare condition that causes nerve damage, but CDC hasn't confirmed that connection. It's very rare for anyone to die from Zika.

Zika and pregnant women

The main health concern with Zika is the virus' effect in pregnant women. Since the disease was reported in Brazil in May 2015, reports of microcephaly have increased there. Microcephaly is a birth defect in which a baby is born with a small head and other possible developmental problems. Science has not proven for sure that Zika is the cause. But health officials are telling pregnant women to take caution, just in case.

CDC advises that pregnant women avoid traveling to countries with Zika transmission. Women who are trying to become pregnant or who are pregnant should talk to their doctors first before traveling to areas with Zika. Pregnant women who live in or visit areas with Zika should take care to protect themselves from mosquitoes.



How else is Zika spread?

Zika virus can also be spread via sex. CDC is advising that men who may have been exposed to Zika and have pregnant partners wear condoms during sex or that they abstain from sexual activity.

There are concerns that Zika may be spread via blood. The Food and Drug Administration says that people who may have been exposed to the virus should not donate blood for at least four weeks to be sure they don't pass Zika to others.

How can I prevent or treat Zika?



There are no vaccines or treatments for Zika, other than caring for symptoms. The best way to avoid Zika is to not get bitten by mosquitoes. Here are some steps CDC recommends:

- ◆ When outdoors, wear approved repellents with DEET. Follow all directions on the label.
- ◆ Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants. Treat your clothing with the chemical repellent permethrin or buy pre-treated clothes.
- ◆ Stay in places with screens on windows and doors that keep mosquitoes out.

You can also play a part by getting rid of places where mosquitoes breed around your home. The Environmental Protection Agency says you should get rid of standing water in rain gutters, tires, buckets, plastic covers, toys and containers where mosquitoes might lay eggs.

It's also a good idea to empty and change water in bird baths, rain barrels and potted plant trays at least once a week, EPA says. Water in swimming pools should be circulated and treated.

What else is known?

Zika virus is spread by a type of mosquito called Aedes. These kinds of mosquitoes also spread dengue and chikungunya. So preventing mosquito bites and mosquito breeding makes sense for many reasons. Health officials are predicting that Zika could be shared by mosquitoes in the U.S. at some point, though it's not expected to be spread widely.

For more tips on Zika, visit www.apha.org/zika and www.cdc.gov/zika.



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