Zika Virus: Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is Zika virus disease (Zika)?**

Zika is a disease caused by Zika virus that is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. People usually don’t get sick enough to go to the hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika.

1. **What are the symptoms of Zika?**

About 1 in 5 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 are fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Symptoms typically begin 2 to 7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

1. **How is Zika transmitted?**

* Mosquitoes: Zika is primarily transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes (*a. aegypti* and *A. albopictus),* the same mosquitoes that spread Chikungunya and Dengue. We do not have these types of mosquitoes in Montana. These mosquitoes are aggressive daytime biters and they can also bite at night. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite a person already infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites.
* Mother-to-baby: It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. We are studying how some mothers can pass the virus to their babies.
* Sexually: Zika can be spread by a man to his sex partners. In known cases of likely sexual transmission, the men had Zika symptoms. The virus is present in semen longer than in blood.
* Blood transfusion**:** Currently, there have been no confirmed cases of Zika transmitted through a blood transfusion in the United States. There have been multiple cases of transmission through blood transfusion in Brazil.

1. **Who is at risk of being infected?**

Anyone who lives in or travels to an area where Zika virus is found and has not already been infected with Zika virus can get it from mosquito bites. Women who have unprotected sex with a man who has become infected with Zika are also at risk of being infected.

1. **What countries have Zika?**

Specific areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are often difficult to determine and are likely to change over time. If traveling, please visit the CDC Travelers' Health site for the most updated travel information.

1. **What can people do to prevent becoming infected with Zika?**

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. To protect yourself from Zika through sex, abstain from sexual activity with men who have traveled to Zika affected areas. To prevent diseases spread by mosquitoes, 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 safety and 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 2 months of age.
  + Dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs, or
  + 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.
  + Spray insect repellent onto your hands and then apply to a child’s face.
* Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or buy 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.

1. **What is the treatment for Zika?**

There is no vaccine or specific medicine to treat Zika virus infections.

Treat the symptoms:

* Get plenty of rest.
* Drink fluids to prevent dehydration.
* Take medicine such as acetaminophen to reduce fever and pain.
* Do not take aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.
* If you are taking medicine for another medical condition, talk to your healthcare provider before taking additional medication.

1. **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.

1. **Does Zika virus infection in pregnant women cause birth defects?**

There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly (a condition in which a baby’s head is smaller than expected) and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. Knowledge of the link between Zika 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):
  + Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
  + 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.
* 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 virus infection.
  + Strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

1. **Does Zika virus infection cause Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)?**

Guillain-Barré 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 several months. While most people fully recover from GBS, some people have permanent damage and in rare cases, people have died. We do not know if Zika virus infection causes GBS. It is difficult to determine if any particular germ “causes” GBS. The Brazil Ministry of Health (MOH) is reporting an increased number of people affected with GBS. CDC is collaborating with the Brazil MOH to determine if having Zika makes it more likely you will get GBS.

1. **Is this a new virus?**

No. Outbreaks of Zika previously have been reported in tropical Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Zika virus likely will continue to spread to new areas. In May 2015, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued an alert regarding the first confirmed Zika virus infection in Brazil. Since that time, local transmission has been reported in many other countries and territories.

1. **Is there Zika virus in the United States?**

Currently (as of 2/25/2016), there have been 107 cases of Zika identified in the United States. All of these cases are in patients who traveled to other countries where Zika is present. There have been no cases that have been transmitted within the United States.

**For more information, please go to** [**www.cdc.gov/zika**](http://www.cdc.gov/zika) **or call the Missoula City-County Health Department, Infectious Disease Office at (406)258-3896.**