



# Zika Virus Fact Sheet

## What is the Zika virus and how does it spread?

- Zika virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.
- This type of mosquito is not found in Canada.
- On rare occasions, Zika virus can spread through having sex with an infected male; it is unknown how long the virus remains in semen.
- Zika may also spread through giving blood; the virus lives in the blood for at least one week after recovery from a Zika virus infection.
- An infected pregnant woman may give the Zika virus to her unborn baby either during the pregnancy or while the baby is being born.
- A recent outbreak of Zika virus in Brazil may be connected to an increase in the number of birth defects, such as an abnormally small head and improperly developed brain.
- It may also be connected to an increase in the number of nervous system problems that cause muscle weakness (Guillain-Barré Syndrome), in all age groups.
- There is no medication or vaccine that protects against Zika virus.

## Is it safe to travel to areas with Zika virus?

- Zika virus is usually a mild illness and seldom a problem for healthy individuals.
- The World Health Organization has not placed a ban on travel to areas with Zika virus.
- Anyone travelling to a Zika area should try to prevent mosquito bites.
- Women who could become pregnant should use reliable birth control during their trip, and for at least one to two months after their trip, and talk to their health care provider for the most up-to-date advice.
- Pregnant women, or those trying to become pregnant, are advised to consider postponing travel to areas with Zika virus. This can be discussed with their health care provider. If they decide to travel, they should be careful to avoid mosquito bites.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Zika virus?

- Only one in five people infected with Zika virus has any symptoms.
- The time from exposure to feeling sick is about 3 to 12 days.
- The symptoms include mild fever, a flat red rash, red eyes (conjunctivitis), muscle and joint pain, weakness and headaches. These symptoms may last up to a week.

## How is Zika virus diagnosed?

- Diagnosis is based on level of risk, including travel location, accommodation, season, activities while travelling, signs and symptoms, and a blood or urine test.
- Confirmation of a diagnosis with a blood test can be difficult if you have been infected before with a similar virus, such as Dengue, Chikungunya or Yellow Fever.

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### **What is the treatment for Zika virus?**

- Zika virus disease is usually mild; treatment should include plenty of rest and fluids, with acetaminophen / Tylenol® for pain and / or fever.
- Do not use medication that contains acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) or ibuprofen (NSAIDS), if there is a chance you could be infected with Dengue virus as it may cause internal bleeding.
- If symptoms worsen, or if you are pregnant or have a partner who is pregnant, see your health care provider.

### **How do I protect myself from the Zika virus?**

- Zika virus infected mosquitoes are daytime biters, so it is important to prevent mosquito bites all day long, especially early morning and late afternoon, during the entire day if it is overcast, and after dark in well-lit areas or if they managed to get inside.
- Follow the Insect Precautions Fact Sheet.
- Protect yourself with insect repellent containing either 20 to 30% DEET or 20% picaridin (icaridin) and reapply it as frequently as directed; if concentration is lower, apply more frequently; wear clothes, preferably light-coloured, that cover as much of the body as possible; use the insecticide, permethrin, on clothing, if it is available, or DEET, especially on collars and cuffs; use air conditioning; close doors and windows or use screens; and sleep under a mosquito net (preferably treated with permethrin), if possible.
- Insect repellents containing DEET and picaridin are safe for pregnant and nursing women and children, if used as directed.
- If using both sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and the insect repellent at least 15 minutes later.

### **What else do I need to know?**

- If you have travelled to a Zika area and have experienced symptoms of Zika virus, either during your trip or up to two weeks after your return, you should talk to your health care provider about a diagnosis.
- Do not donate blood for at least one month after returning from a Zika area.
- Pregnant women, whose male partners have either had the Zika virus (confirmed by a blood / urine test) or are at risk for Zika infection, should either use condoms or not have sexual intercourse until they discuss their partner's risk factors with their health care provider.

### **Other Questions?**

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

### **References**

- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
- National Pesticide Information Centre
- New England Journal of Medicine
- Government of Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- World Health Organization

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