

Update on the Zika Virus

Zika virus is a mild disease and most people with the virus do not have symptoms. However, the recent rise in the spread of Zika virus in Brazil has been accompanied by an unprecedented rise in the number of children being born with unusually small heads—identified as microcephaly. In addition, several countries, including Brazil, reported a steep increase in Guillain-Barré syndrome—a neurological disorder that could lead to paralysis and death. Evidence is growing that Zika virus causes both microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome.

The period of the Olympic Games will be winter, which is a period where the mosquitos are supposed the less active. However, the risk zero does not exist and all persons wishing to attend the Games should be aware of the following extract from WHO webpage as well CDC health information for travellers.

How do people catch Zika virus?

Zika virus is primarily transmitted to people through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, which also transmits chikungunya, dengue and yellow fever. Zika virus can also be transmitted through sex.

Zika virus has been detected in blood, urine, amniotic fluids, semen, saliva as well as body fluids found in the brain and spinal cord.

What are the symptoms of Zika virus disease?

Zika virus usually causes mild illness. Symptoms most commonly include a slight fever or rash, appearing a few days after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito. Although many will not develop any symptoms at all, others may also suffer from conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, and feel tired. The symptoms usually last from 2 to 7 days.

There is no known difference in the symptoms of infected pregnant and non-pregnant women.

What can people do to protect themselves from mosquito bites?

The best protection from Zika virus is preventing mosquito bites. Women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant and their sexual partners should take extra care to protect themselves from the bites of the mosquito that transmits Zika. This can be done by:

- Wearing clothes (preferably light-coloured) that cover as much of the body as possible.
- Using insect repellent: repellents may be applied to exposed skin or to clothing, and should contain DEET (diethyltoluamide) or IR 3535 or Icaridin which are the most common biologically active ingredients in insect repellents. Repellents must be used in strict accordance with the label instructions. They are safe for use by pregnant women.

Sexual transmission

Recommendations for prevention of sexual transmission of Zika virus for couples who have travelled to or reside in an area with active Zika virus transmission:

- **Couples in which a woman is pregnant**

Couples in which a woman is pregnant should use condoms consistently and correctly or abstain from sex for the duration of the pregnancy.

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- **Other couples concerned about sexual transmission***
 - Couples in which a man had confirmed Zika virus infection or clinical illness consistent with Zika virus disease should consider using condoms or abstaining from sex for at least 6 months after onset of illness. Couples in which a woman had confirmed Zika virus infection or clinical illness consistent with Zika virus disease should consider waiting at least 8 weeks after symptom onset to attempt conception.
 - Couples in which a man or woman travelled to an area with active Zika virus transmission but did not develop symptoms of Zika virus disease should consider using condoms or abstaining from sex for at least 8 weeks after departure from the area.
 - Couples in which a man resides in an area with active Zika virus transmission but has not developed symptoms of Zika virus disease might consider using condoms or abstaining from sex while active transmission persists.

* Couples who do not desire pregnancy should use the most effective contraceptive methods that can be used correctly and consistently in addition to condoms, which also reduce the risk for sexually transmitted infections. Couples planning conception have a number of factors to consider, which are discussed in more detail in the following: [Petersen EE, Polen KN, Meaney-Delman D. et al. Update: interim guidance for health care providers caring for women of reproductive age with possible Zika virus exposure—United States, 2016. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2016](#). Published online March 25, 2016

Travel

Travellers to areas with Zika virus outbreaks should be provided with up-to-date advice on potential risks and appropriate measures to reduce the possibility of exposure to mosquito bites and, upon return, should take appropriate measures, including safe sex, to reduce the risk of onward transmission.

Based on available evidence, there are no general restrictions on travel or trade with countries, areas and/or territories with Zika virus transmission. Countries reporting sporadic Zika infections in travellers arriving from affected countries pose little, if any, risk of onward transmission.

Pregnant women should be advised not to travel to areas of ongoing Zika virus outbreaks. As mentioned above, Zika virus is spread primarily by mosquitoes although Zika virus can also be transmitted through sex.

All men and women returning from an area where Zika is circulating - especially pregnant women and their partners - should refer to the advice above regarding sexual transmission.

Ref. World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)