

# Zika Virus

## Fact Sheet

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

- The Zika virus is primarily spread to humans by the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. This type of mosquito is **not** found in Canada.
- Zika virus can also spread through having sex with an infected sexual partner or through donating blood, organs, tissue or cells.
- An infected pregnant woman may give the Zika virus to her unborn baby either during the pregnancy or while the baby is being born.
- An outbreak of Zika virus in Brazil may be connected to an increase in a birth defect called microcephaly, which involves an abnormally small head / improperly developed brain.
- It may also be connected to an increase in the number of cases of a nervous system problem—Guillain-Barré Syndrome—that can cause muscle weakness 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.
- Pregnant women, or those trying to become pregnant, are advised to avoid or consider postponing travel to countries with recent or ongoing risk of Zika virus infection, which are listed on the Government of Canada website. This can be discussed with their health care provider. If they decide to travel, they should be careful to avoid mosquito bites.
- Women who *could* become pregnant should use reliable birth control during their trip, and for at least two months after their trip, and talk to their health care provider for the most up-to-date advice.

### 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.

### 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.

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## How do I protect myself from the mosquitoes that carry Zika virus?

- Zika virus infected mosquitoes usually bite during the day, but they can also bite at night, so it is important to prevent mosquito bites at all times.
- Follow detailed instructions on the Insect Precautions Fact Sheet, e.g. cover up, stay in rooms with air conditioning, use bed nets and protect exposed skin with insect repellent containing either 20 to 30% DEET or 20% picaridin (icaridin).
- Insect repellents containing DEET and picaridin are safe for pregnant and nursing women and children, if used as directed. Picaridin is preferred for children 6 months to 12 yrs old.
- 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.
- If there is a chance you could have the virus, use strict mosquito bite prevention measures to avoid spreading the disease to others while you are in an area where there are *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, especially during the first week of illness.
- Men returning from a Zika area are at risk for having an undiagnosed Zika virus infection since only 1 in 5 people with the infection has any symptoms. If their partner is pregnant, for the duration of the pregnancy, the couple should abstain or use condoms correctly from start to finish every time they have sex since it is unknown how long the virus survives in semen.
- Similarly, men returning from a Zika area, with a partner who *could be or could become* pregnant, or with any sexual partner, should use condoms correctly from start to finish every time they have sex or abstain for at least 6 months after they return.
- If you have questions or concerns, consult with your health care provider for the most up-to-date advice. For a recent list of Zika virus affected areas: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices/152>
- Do **not** donate blood, cells, tissue or organs for at least one month after returning from a Zika area or after any symptoms of Zika clear up. Discuss this with Canadian Blood Services before donating.

## Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803, ext. 349. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [hpePublicHealth.ca](http://hpePublicHealth.ca)

## References

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

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