

Zika

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What is zika?

Zika is a virus caused by a bite from the *Aedes* mosquito. If you have the Zika virus, you can pass it onto humans. This happens through pregnancy, sex (oral, vaginal, and anal), and organ and tissue donation. Pregnant women and women trying to get pregnant are not more likely to get Zika. However, they are at a greater risk of passing it onto their unborn baby. The Zika virus is present in certain regions. Recent outbreaks have occurred in United States, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, parts of the Caribbean, and Central and South America. The virus is linked to an increase of babies born with smaller-than-average heads (microcephaly). This condition causes severe brain defects.

Symptoms of zika

Mild symptoms include:

- Fever
- Rash
- Red eyes
- Joint/muscle pain
- Headache

Few people experience symptoms. In fact, most people don't know they have the virus. Symptoms usually last 2 to 7 days. It can last longer.

A baby infected with the virus in utero (in the womb) will have the following symptoms:

- A smaller-than-average head
- Brain defects/intellectual disability

Virus complications include:

- Pregnancy loss (miscarriage or stillbirth)
- Premature birth

Nerve disorders in adults and children. This includes Guillain-Barré syndrome, neuropathy, and myelitis.

What causes zika?

A bite from the Aedes mosquito causes the Zika virus. This species also spreads dengue fever and the chikungunya virus. This type of mosquito bites during the day and is attracted to water. People infected with the virus can spread it even if they have no symptoms.

How is zika diagnosed?

Your doctor will do a physical exam. He or she will ask you if you have traveled to regions where the virus is present. There are two types of tests your doctor can perform to confirm a diagnosis, including:

- A blood test will show if your body is trying to fight off the Zika infection.
- A urine test will show the presence of the virus. It will be positive if Zika has been in your system for less than 2 weeks.

Test results usually come back in 3 to 5 days.

If you are pregnant and test positive for Zika, your doctor will add you to the U.S. Zika Pregnancy Registry. This list is confidential and free. Doctors and researchers study the data and the effects of Zika. You might require additional tests to check your baby's health. Your doctor can test your baby for microcephaly during pregnancy or post-birth.

Can zika be prevented or avoided?

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. Find out and avoid regions where Zika exists. Zika travel alerts are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. You are at greater risk if you live in a Zika area. You are at increased risk if your sexual partner travels there. If your partner has been exposed to regions with Zika, practice safe sex and use condoms.

Avoid mosquito bites. Wear approved insect spray and long clothes. Stay in places with air condition. Stay in places with screened-in doors and windows. Avoid walking near bodies of water. Sleep with a mosquito net. Approved insect repellent is safe for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Zika treatment

There is no medicine to treat the Zika virus. Talk to your doctor before taking any medicine for symptoms. Also, there is no cure for babies born with microcephaly. A baby with microcephaly will need learning interventions from birth on.

Living with zika

If you have Zika, it will run its course in 2 to 7 days. You may need to treat symptoms with over-the-counter pain medicine. If you have Zika, use condoms to avoid spreading the virus (vaginal or anal). Remember that oral sex can also spread the virus.

If you are trying to get pregnant and recently visited a region with Zika, talk to your doctor. He or she may suggest that you wait a period of time. If you are pregnant and might have Zika, contact your doctor immediately. Doctors and scientists hope to create a vaccine and cure for the Zika virus.

Questions to ask your doctor

- Can I get zika more than once?
- If I'm pregnant and exposed to zika, what are the chances I will infect my baby?
- Will I always be a carrier of zika?
- Does zika pass through breast milk?
- What is the incubation period that you can pass it on through sex?

Resources

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Zika Virus](#)

[U.S. National Library of Medicine, Zika Virus](#)