

Better Health 4 YOU

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WELLNESS-Zika Virus What You Should Know

The WHO (World Health Organization) says Zika virus is “spreading explosively” in the Americas. Because it’s been linked to birth defects in babies born to pregnant women, the CDC has issued travel warnings for pregnant women in countries where the disease has been found. Zika is primarily mosquito-borne, although cases of sexual transmission have

spreading through sexual contact was reported in Dallas County, TX. There, a person who’d traveled to an area that had cases of the virus infected a partner who had not traveled.

What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

The disease can cause fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis, also called

The World Health Organization on January 28, 2016 said the Zika virus was “spreading explosively” in the Americas. The agency predicts 3-4 million people could be infected with the virus this year in the Americas.

been reported.

Zika virus, first identified in Uganda in 1947, is transmitted by the same type of mosquito that carries dengue fever, yellow fever, and chikungunya virus. A mosquito bites an infected person and then passes those viruses to other people it bites. Outbreaks did not occur outside of Africa until 2007, when it spread to the South Pacific.

CDC Director Tom Frieden, MD, told reporters that “on occasion,” it may be spread through sexual contact or blood transfusions. In early February, a case of Zika

pinkeye. But most people won’t know they have it.

Only about 1 in 5 people with the virus will exhibit symptoms,” says Amesh Adalja, MD, a spokesman for the Infectious Diseases Society of America. “The vast majority have no symptoms at all.”

Adalja also says the virus rarely causes major complications. “It’s never been thought of as a severe infectious disease until now.”

How is Zika virus treated?

There’s no treatment, but Adalja says most people with symptoms

Where They Hide Out



These mosquitos live under decks, patio furniture and in homes that don’t have cool air...they don’t much like air conditioning. They especially love the drip trays that collect extra water under potted plants. Another place they like to hide is in the corrugated extenders that people attach to downspouts to direct rainwater away from their homes



do well with over-the-counter medications for aches and pains. The disease usually runs its course within a week or so.

What is the connection between Zika, microcephaly, and pregnancy?

Zika has been tied to cases of microcephaly (small heads) in babies born to infected pregnant women. Microcephaly stunts a baby’s head growth, causing

devastating, sometimes-fatal brain damage, and it can result in miscarriage or stillbirth. A cause-and-effect link with the Zika virus hasn't been definitely established, though.

The virus has caused panic in Brazil since it first appeared there in May. More than 4,000 babies in Brazil have reportedly been born with microcephaly. Brazil and several other nations have advised women to postpone pregnancy.

Although there are many causes of microcephaly in babies, including infections during pregnancy, genetic problems, and exposure to toxic substances during pregnancy, Frieden said that the link between the two appears to be getting stronger the more researchers learn.

The CDC said in January that it tested samples provided by Brazilian health authorities from two pregnancies that ended in miscarriage and two infants with microcephaly who died shortly after birth. In the two full-term infants, the Zika virus was present in the brain. In all four cases, genetic testing showed the virus was the same as the Zika strain circulating in Brazil. All four mothers reported having a fever and a rash consistent with Zika virus during their pregnancies, the CDC says.

That declaration will speed up research into the suspected connection between the virus and cases of microcephaly in babies of infected pregnant women.

The CDC has warned pregnant women in any trimester to "consider postponing travel" to more than 25 countries and territories. It covers countries and territories where Zika transmission is ongoing: American Samoa, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Cape Verde, Columbia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Guatemala,

Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, St. Martin, Samoa, Suriname, Tonga, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Venezuela

Pregnant women who must travel, as well as women who are thinking about becoming pregnant, should talk to their doctor first and "strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites" during their trip, the CDC says.

"Especially in the first trimester or early second trimester, going to an area with Zika virus circulating is pretty risky," he says. "Even though the link between Zika and microcephaly is not completely solid, it's very likely that Zika is involved, and I certainly would not recommend that pregnant women travel to areas where epidemics are ongoing."

Are we at risk of an outbreak in the U.S.?

Experts had predicted Zika's arrival in the U.S., as it can be carried by travelers from the Caribbean or Latin America. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second largest city, will host the 2016 Summer Olympics in August, which will draw people from around the globe.

Weaver says it's unlikely we will experience the same mass outbreaks, since we are not exposed to mosquitoes on the same level as people in Latin America and the Caribbean are, he says.

J. Erin Staples, MD, PhD, medical epidemiologist with the Arboviral Diseases Branch of the CDC, agrees. "We are not able to predict how much Zika virus will occur in the United States," she writes. "However, recent chikungunya and dengue outbreaks in the United States suggest that Zika virus outbreaks in the U.S. mainland may be relatively small and local."

Aedes mosquitoes, which spread Zika, are found in every country in

North, Central, and South America except for two -- Canada and continental Chile, according to the WHO's Regional Office for the Americas. The agency "anticipates that Zika virus will continue to spread and will likely reach all countries and territories of the region where Aedes mosquitoes are found."

So far, doctors have seen at least 35 cases of it in U.S. travelers coming back from the Caribbean and Central and South America, with more reported, Frieden said Feb. 5. Six include pregnant women.

If you plan to travel in affected areas, avoid mosquito bites by using mosquito repellent throughout the day. Also, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, both indoors and out. The mosquitoes that spread Zika are aggressive daytime biters often found indoors, which we're not used to in the U.S., Weaver says.

"You need to protect yourself all day long," Weaver says.

Even those who don't know they have Zika can spread the disease. Weaver advises people who have traveled to affected regions to be extremely vigilant against mosquito bites when they return home, especially during the first 10 days.

The CDC has also advised that men who have lived or traveled in areas with Zika infections and have a pregnant sex partner either use condoms or abstain from sex during the pregnancy.



Mary Beth Cyliax RN, CCM

314-652-8175 ext. 310

Call me anytime with questions