

# ZIKA VIRUS INFECTION: OVERVIEW AND STATUS UPDATE

## What is Zika virus infection?

Zika virus infection is a mosquito-borne viral illness caused by the Zika virus. This virus was first identified in 1947 in a rhesus monkey in Uganda. It was identified in humans in 1952 in Uganda and Tanzania. The Zika virus is in the Flavivirus family, the same family of viruses that cause Dengue, Japanese encephalitis, West Nile fever and Yellow Fever. Outbreaks of Zika virus infection have occurred in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. There is currently an ongoing Zika virus outbreak in the Americas

## How is Zika virus infection transmitted?

Zika virus is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. Aedes mosquitoes breed in stagnant pools of water and usually bite during the daytime hours. Their peak biting times are dawn and dusk. Infected pregnant women can transmit the virus to the fetus. There are no reports of transmission from mother to baby through breast feeding. Spread of the virus through sexual contact and blood transfusion has also been reported.



## What are the symptoms?

People who are infected with Zika virus typically experience acute onset of the following symptoms:



- Fever, lethargy
- Skin rashes
- Conjunctivitis (eye redness)
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headache

Zika virus infection during pregnancy has also been associated with pregnancy loss and congenital microcephaly (type of brain development abnormality) in babies. However, a definite causal link has not been established. Further investigation is ongoing.

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### How long after being exposed will I exhibit symptoms?

Most infected people do not exhibit symptoms. Symptoms develop in 20 – 25% of people who become infected with Zika virus and typically occur 2 - 12 days after the infected mosquito bites. The symptoms last 2 - 7 days and are usually mild. Severe disease needing hospitalization is uncommon and the mortality rate from this disease is low.

### How can I protect myself?

Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against Zika virus infection. Actions you can take to protect yourself from Zika virus infection are as follows:

-  Consult with your health care professional prior to travel to Zika outbreak areas
-  Use insect repellent spray or cream. Travelers should purchase insect repellent spray prior to their trip as these may not be readily available in the destination location.
-  Cover exposed skin by wearing long sleeved tops and long pants
-  Use air conditioning or window and door screens when indoors
-  Use mosquito nets
-  Avoid the outdoors especially during the mosquitoes' peak feeding time (dawn, dusk and early evening)
-  Eliminate mosquito breeding sites (e.g. stagnant water pools, flower pots, tires or buckets)
-  Take appropriate precautions to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases

### Medical Intelligence Status Update

According to the Pan American health Organization, the countries and territories that have to date confirmed local Zika virus transmission are Brazil, Barbados, Cape Verde, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Saint Martin, Suriname, and Venezuela.

Three cases of Zika virus infection, associated with travel to Colombia, Suriname, and Guyana, have been diagnosed in UK travelers.

### Security Risk Update

There are currently no security implications stemming from Zika virus. UnitedHealthcare Global will continue to monitor the outbreak and will alert clients to any risks that arise.

### Are there any risks to me as I travel?

The CDC has currently issued a level 2 alert for international travelers advising enhanced precautions for all travelers to affected destinations. Currently, the CDC advises that pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas with ongoing Zika virus infections. Pregnant women or women who may become pregnant, who must travel to these areas should speak with their doctor and follow strict preventive precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

The World Health Organization (WHO), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide frequent updates regarding Zika virus infections. The links to their sites are provided below. These sites are your best source of current information for travel guidance and recommendations.

- **CDC:** <http://www.cdc.gov/zika>
- **ECDC:** [http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/zika\\_virus\\_infection/Pages/index.aspx](http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/zika_virus_infection/Pages/index.aspx)
- **Pan American Health Organization:** [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_topics&view=article&id=427&Itemid=41484&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_topics&view=article&id=427&Itemid=41484&lang=en)
- **WHO:** <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/zika/en/>