



## Zika Questions and Answers

### What is Zika?

Zika is an infectious disease caused by the Zika virus, which is transmitted to people by *Aedes* mosquitoes. Symptoms of Zika typically include fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes.

### Where does Zika occur?

Zika occurs in many tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and islands in the Pacific Ocean. Recent outbreaks have occurred in [the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico](#).

### How do people get Zika?

Zika virus is primarily transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes (also known as yellow fever mosquitoes) and by *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes (also known as Asian tiger mosquitoes). These mosquitoes are not native to California. However, since 2011 they have been detected in [several California counties](#). An *Aedes* mosquito can only transmit Zika virus after it bites a person who has this virus in their blood. Thus far in California, Zika virus infections have been documented only in a few people who were infected while traveling outside the United States. Zika virus is not spread through casual contact such as touching or hugging an infected person.

### What are the symptoms of Zika?

Most people infected with Zika virus have no symptoms. If symptoms develop, the most common are fever, rash, joint pain, and/or red eyes. Symptoms usually begin 3-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and last several days to a week. There are other causes of fever and painful joints. If you have recently traveled to an area where Zika virus is present and you have these symptoms, your healthcare provider can order different tests to help determine the cause.

### What's the relationship between Zika virus and microcephaly in newborns?

There is a possible association between Zika and [microcephaly](#) (abnormally small head and brain) in newborns. It is suspected that pregnant women who get infected with Zika virus may pass the virus to the developing fetus. However, there are many causes of microcephaly in babies, and whether Zika virus infection causes microcephaly has not been confirmed. Studies are needed to understand this possible relationship.

**Until more is known, and out of an abundance of caution, the California Department of Public Health recommends special [travel precautions for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant](#):**

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
- Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas should talk to their healthcare provider first and strictly follow [steps to avoid mosquito bites](#) during the trip
- Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their healthcare provider before traveling to these areas and strictly follow [steps to avoid mosquito bites](#) during the trip.
- Pregnant women who traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission should be evaluated for Zika virus infection if they had any symptoms suggestive of Zika or if their baby has evidence of microcephaly. Other mosquito-borne virus infections, such as dengue and chikungunya, should be ruled out in these patients.
- Pregnant women who traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission but who have *not* had symptoms may be offered Zika virus testing from 2 to 12 weeks after travel.
- Pregnant women whose male partners have or are at risk for Zika virus infection (e.g.,



travel to areas with Zika virus transmission), should consider using condoms or abstaining from sex during the course of pregnancy.

- Women of reproductive age who are traveling to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing and who want to avoid pregnancy during the time they are traveling should talk to their health care provider to discuss effective strategies to prevent unintended pregnancy.

### **What's the relationship between Zika virus and Guillain-Barré Syndrome?**

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare autoimmune disease affecting the nervous system leading to muscle weakness and possible paralysis. While most people recover from GBS, some people have permanent damage and in rare cases, people have died. Cases of GBS were reported among some persons with Zika in the French Polynesia Zika outbreak in 2013-2014, and an increase of GBS cases has recently been noted in some South American countries where Zika outbreaks are ongoing. Whether Zika virus infection and GBS are related is still not clear and is being investigated.

### **Is Zika a sexually transmitted infection?**

Spread of Zika virus through sexual contact has been reported, although there is limited data about the risk. It is not clear how frequently Zika virus is transmitted through sex and how long infected persons might be infectious. The risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by correct and consistent use of condoms.

### **How is Zika treated?**

There is no specific treatment for Zika. Talk with your health care provider about medications to help reduce fever and pain; rest and fluids are also helpful. Most people will feel better in about a week.

### **What can people do to keep from getting Zika?**

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. In areas where Zika is present, everyone, including pregnant women and women of childbearing age, should protect themselves from mosquito bites.

- Mosquito repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus should be applied to exposed skin and clothing.
- **Using insect repellent is safe and effective. Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding can and should choose an EPA-registered insect repellent and use it according to the product label.**
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If you are not able to protect yourself from mosquitoes inside your home or hotel, sleep under a mosquito bed net.

Regarding potential transmission of Zika virus through sex, the risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus can be eliminated by abstinence and reduced by correct and consistent use of condoms.

### **What can people do to help prevent Zika from becoming established in California?**

- If you are sick with fever, rash, red eyes, or joint pain within 2 weeks after returning from an area where Zika occurs, contact your healthcare provider and avoid mosquito bites to help prevent possible spread of the virus.
- To reduce mosquito breeding, check your yard often for water-filled containers. Clean and scrub bird baths and pet-watering dishes weekly and dump the water from overflow dishes under potted plants and flower pots. Check that gutters are not holding water.
- Contact your local vector control agency if you detect unusual numbers of mosquitoes or you are being bitten during the day.



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**Where can I find more information about Zika?**

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>

California Department of Public Health:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Zika.aspx>

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