

Zika Virus in Illinois



Senator John G. Mulroe
Chairman, Public Health Committee

What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness spread primarily through mosquito bites – similar to how West Nile virus or dengue virus is *transmitted*.

What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

The most common symptoms of Zika are: fever, rash, joint pain, and/or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache.

How is Zika virus spread?

Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito and not person-to-person like the flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact has been reported.

“There is virtually no risk to Illinois residents since you cannot contract Zika virus from another person, but only through the bite of an infected mosquito.”

–IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D.

Because it's possible Zika virus can be transmitted through sex and because our primary concern is the protection of pregnant women, we recommend that men who either live in or have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission and who have a pregnant sex partner should either (1) consistently and correctly use condoms during sex, or (2) abstain from sexual activity during the duration of pregnancy.

What can people do to prevent becoming infected with Zika?

Because Zika virus is spread primarily by mosquitoes, CDC recommends that all travelers protect themselves from this disease by taking steps to prevent mosquito bites - use insect repellent, wear long sleeves and pants, and stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens.

Does Zika virus cause birth defects?

There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly (a condition in which a baby's head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age) and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. More research is being done on the nature of this association and with each passing day, the linkage between Zika and microcephaly becomes stronger.

Are there cases of Zika virus in Illinois?

As of February 4, 2016, IDPH is reporting three confirmed, travel-related cases of Zika virus in Illinois residents. Two cases were among pregnant women and the third in a man. These individuals traveled separately to Colombia, Haiti and Honduras. The locations of these residents are not being released as there is no risk to the public of transmission of the virus.

Are Illinoisans at risk of Zika virus? Do the mosquitoes in Illinois carry the virus?

The risk of Zika virus to Illinoisans is very low. Zika virus is primarily spread through the bite from an infected mosquito and not person-to-person like the flu. The type of mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) that carries Zika virus has rarely been found in Illinois and is more prevalent in tropical climates. This type of mosquito also cannot survive the freezing temperatures we see in Illinois.

What is Illinois doing to prepare for Zika virus, especially as the weather warms up?

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), in partnership with local health departments and hospitals across Illinois, has a robust surveillance system (Illinois National Electronic Disease Surveillance System), which we recently expanded to include Zika virus. IDPH has provided guidance to local health departments, hospitals, infectious disease physicians, and infections control preventionists about basic Zika virus information, and direction on what health care providers should look for and do, as well as laboratory testing protocol. IDPH is in the process of obtaining certification from CDC to test for Zika virus.

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Source: Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)

More details from the IDPH can be found at: <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/qna-zika-virus.pdf>