



## **ZIKA VIRUS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **WHAT IS ZIKA VIRUS DISEASE?**

Zika virus has caused outbreaks of mild illness from time to time since its discovery in Africa in 1947.

### **WHAT COUNTRIES CURRENTLY HAVE OUTBREAKS OF ZIKA VIRUS?**

In late 2015, Zika virus was reported for the first time in a number of countries in Central and South America and has since spread to most of the Caribbean. The World Health Organization website has an up to date list of affected nations:

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/archive/disease/zika-virus-infection/en/>

### **HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CASES IN CANADA?**

Yes, a small number of Canadian travel-related cases have occurred, with more expected.

### **HOW IS IT SPREAD?**

Zika virus is transmitted by the *Aedes* mosquito, which also spreads the dengue and Chikungunya viruses. It is a day-biting mosquito with highest activity in the hours just after sunrise and just before sunset. This mosquito is not suited to a northern climate therefore local transmission in Canada is highly unlikely.

There have been reports of the virus spreading through sexual contact.

Though it is unlikely that the Zika virus will infect Canada's blood supply, Canadian Blood Services has asked potential donors to donate prior to leaving to the country or wait one month after returning to Canada if they have travelled to a country with Zika virus.

### **WHO IS AT RISK?**

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found (including Mexico, the Caribbean, and many parts of Central and South America) who has not already been infected with Zika virus is at risk for infection.

### **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**

The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Symptoms typically last 2 to 7 days.

Only about 20% of people that get infected with Zika will actually get sick and the illness is usually mild. As a result, many people might not realize they have been infected.

### **HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?**

Anyone who develops symptoms of Zika virus infection within 2 weeks of travel to an affected area should seek medical care and report of their travel history. This is especially true for pregnant women.

Infection with Zika virus is diagnosed by symptoms, travel history and laboratory tests. Blood and urine tests can be used to diagnose infection. As well, it is important to get tested for other viral diseases, namely dengue and Chikungunya.

### **WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR ZIKA VIRUS PROTECTION?**

There is no specific vaccine or medication to treat Zika virus infection.

Treat the symptoms by resting, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking acetaminophen for fever and pain. Aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen should be avoided until dengue virus infection is ruled out.

### **WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT INFECTION WITH ZIKA VIRUS?**

There is no vaccine and no specific antiviral treatment for Zika virus, therefore prevention is very important. Travelers are advised to use appropriate measures to protect against mosquito bites. This includes use of repellants, protective clothing, and bed nets.

### **HOW DOES IT AFFECT PREGNANT WOMEN AND NEWBORNS?**

There have been reports of an increase in some birth defects in newborns and other poor pregnancy outcomes in women were infected with Zika virus during their pregnancy. One of these conditions is a rare but serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly (a condition in which the baby's head is smaller than expected). The link between Zika virus and microcephaly is still being investigated.

At this time there is nothing to suggest that pregnant women are more susceptible or suffer more severe symptoms.

Pregnant women in any trimester are therefore advised to consider postponing travel to any area where there is Zika virus transmission. If travel cannot be avoided, consult your doctor in advance and make sure steps are taken to avoid mosquito bites.

Further information on prevention of mosquito bites can be found at:  
<http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/insect-bite>

#### **For further information:**

- **Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Recommendations on the Prevention and Treatment of Zika Virus**
  - <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/committee-statement-treatment-prevention-zika-declaration-comite-traitement-prevention/index-eng.php>
- **Countries with Zika virus transmission**
  - <http://www.who.int/csr/don/archive/disease/zika-virus-infection/en/>
- **Travel health for Canadians**
  - <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/index-eng.php>