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What You Need to Know About the Zika Virus

Significant concern has been raised about the mosquito-borne Zika virus, which can have devastating effects on human fetuses. This concern has been amplified because one affected area--Brazil--will be hosting the Olympics this summer. On Feb. 8, 2016, the President announced that he is asking Congress for \$1.8 billion to put toward Zika virus funding for research, testing, and public health.

Public Health Issues

World health officials have identified Zika outbreaks in Africa and Southeast Asia prior to 2015. In May 2015, Brazil was added to that list. Currently, health officials have stated that “outbreaks are occurring in many countries.”

United States Public Health Emergency Notifications

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is tracking and reporting on areas of the world where cases of the Zika virus have been confirmed. As of Feb. 3, 2016, the CDC reports 35 cases in the U.S. that are associated with travel; in the U.S. territories, there has been one case reported that is associated with travel, and nine cases locally acquired.

The transmission of the disease is primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. However, the virus is also transmitted other ways. The CDC reports that a “mother already infected with Zika virus can pass the virus to the newborn,” albeit rare, and that the “spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact ha[s] been reported.” However, the data is limited.

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent viral infection. CDC urges individuals to prevent Zika by avoiding mosquito bites. Symptoms of Zika are flu-like and include: fever, rash, joint pain, red eye, muscle pain, and headache. The CDC reports that the incubation period for Zika is not known, but it is likely to be a few days to a week. The CDC encourages individuals who have these symptoms and have visited an area where Zika is found to see a healthcare provider. Zika viral disease

can be diagnosed by using certain clinical laboratory tests with specimens being sent to the CDC for analysis. Specific instructions may be found on [CDC.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) regarding these tests.

The CDC has also released “Interim Guidelines for Prevention of Sexual Transmission of Zika Virus – United States” on Feb. 5, 2016.¹ These guidelines provide specific recommendations for certain individuals to prevent transmission, including recommendations for men and their pregnant partners, as well as recommendations for men and their nonpregnant partners. These recommendations are currently directed to those traveling to an area of active Zika virus transmission.

Travel Advisories

The CDC has published the following Zika Travel Notices (as of Feb. 5, 2016) that include the following countries/territories:

- > Cape Verde;
- > Caribbean (Barbados, Curacao; Dominican Republic; Guadeloupe; Haiti; Jamaica; Martinique; the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; Saint Martin, U.S. Virgin Islands);
- > Central America (Costa Rica; El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama);
- > Mexico;
- > Pacific Islands (American Samoa, Samoa, Tonga); and
- > South America (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, Venezuela).

Updated information can be found on the [CDC’s website](http://www.cdc.gov).

The advisories provide detailed information for individuals traveling to these locations. The advisories recommend that individuals cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and use EPA-registered repellents containing DEET, picardin oil, or IR3535, among other recommendations, to prevent exposure to mosquitos.

The CDC also includes specific recommendations for health care professionals who have patients returning from these countries. Guidelines for treating pregnant women and women of reproductive age are available on CDC’s webpage. These guidelines provide information on testing and follow-up care for these affected populations.

The GT Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force is available to assist with any questions regarding the above information, and will provide updates as necessary.

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¹ Oster AM, Brooks JT, Stryker JE, et al. Interim Guidelines for Prevention of Sexual Transmission of Zika Virus — United States, 2016. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2016;65(Early Release):1–2. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6505e1er>

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