February 4, 2016

Zika Virus Travel Alert and Factsheet

The Zika virus is a cause for concern for those traveling to Central America, South America or Caribbean islands. Zika may be linked to microcephaly, a condition in which a newborn infant's brain and head are abnormally small. Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant soon are advised to postpone visits to areas where Zika virus outbreaks have been seen. If such travel is unavoidable, measures to avoid mosquito bites are strongly encouraged. Women trying to become pregnant should talk to their healthcare provider before traveling to these areas and should avoid mosquito bites during the trip.

What is Zika virus?

Zika virus is an infection that is spread to people through mosquito bites. Only one out of five people infected with the virus will have symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they are usually mild and include fever, rash, joint aching and red eyes (conjunctivitis). Symptoms may last from a couple days to a week. There currently is no vaccine for this virus.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found can be infected with the virus. Mosquito-transmitted Zika virus is not currently found in the United States. Some cases have been reported among travelers returning from places where infection has occurred. Outbreaks of Zika have been confirmed in South and Central America, Africa, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are closely monitoring the outbreaks. Up-to-date information on the spread of Zika may be found at www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/.

The major concern with Zika virus is for babies of mothers who contract the virus while pregnant. Microcephaly and other poor pregnancy outcomes are being studied in a major effort to understand the connection with the virus. US health officials recommend that:

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission has been ongoing.
- Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should talk to their health care provider. In addition, they should take extra care to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.
- Women trying to become pregnant should talk to their healthcare provider before traveling to these areas and should avoid mosquito bites during the trip.

How does Zika virus spread?

Zika virus is mainly spread through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on a person already infected with the virus. These mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites. The *Aedes* mosquitoes typically lay eggs in and near standing water in things like buckets, bowls, animal dishes, pots and vases. They are active during the day.

In rare cases, the Zika virus can be spread from mother to child during pregnancy or around the time of birth. There are currently no reports of infants getting Zika virus through breastfeeding. A few cases have been reported in which the virus was spread through blood transfusion or sexual contact.

How can Zika virus be prevented?

To reduce your risk when traveling to areas where transmission is ongoing or during warm months in the U.S. the most important measure is to prevent mosquito bites:

- Use a mosquito repellent approved by the EPA including those containing DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus, Picaridin or IR3535. Follow directions on the label.
- Do not use concentrations of more than 30% DEET. Apply DEET to exposed skin (not eyes or mouth) and on clothes, but do not use on open cuts or wounds. Do not apply underneath clothes.
- Do not let children apply repellents to themselves. Apply the repellent to your hands and rub it on the child. Do not apply repellents to children's eyes, mouth, or hands and use cautiously around ears. Do not apply DEET on infants (mosquito netting can be used over infant carriers) or oil of lemon eucalyptus on children under 3 years of age.
- Wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If needed, sleep under a mosquito bed net.

In warm weather, remove mosquito habitat around your home. Young mosquitoes (larvae) live in water before growing into adults that can fly. Items that collect water should be emptied at least once a week to prevent mosquito breeding. Pay attention to flower pots, garbage cans, wheelbarrows, old tires, birdbaths and any other items that hold water. Clear rain gutters. Cover swimming pools when not in use.

How is Zika virus treated?

There is currently no specific treatment for Zika virus. Proper care can help relieve symptoms, including getting plenty of rest, drinking fluids to prevent dehydration, and medication to reduce fever and pain. If you develop the symptoms described above and have recently traveled to areas with Zika outbreaks, see your healthcare provider. They may order blood tests to look for Zika.

More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/zika.