

## WHAT TEXANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ZIKA VIRUS

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### WHAT IS ZIKA?



Zika is the name given to a mosquito transmitted disease caused by the Zika virus. The Zika virus is not new, but sometime between 2007 and 2014 the virus began to expand into new countries, and perhaps became more dangerous to people. The illness caused by the Zika virus is usually mild compared to some other mosquito carried viruses like dengue fever, West Nile virus, and chikungunya. Only one in five (1:5) people infected with Zika will feel ill. These individuals typically develop mild symptoms that include fever, joint pain, red itchy eyes (conjunctivitis) and rash. Symptoms typically occur 2 to 7 days following a bite from an infected mosquito. More severe symptoms may occur in some individuals. The association between Zika and a type of paralysis called Guillain-Barre syndrome is under investigation.

Until recently, Zika was considered a mild disease with few lasting effects; however, public health officials are now concerned that pregnant individuals who contract Zika pass the virus on to their unborn babies which may result in a type of birth defect known as microcephaly. Microcephaly is a condition where the fetal head and brain do not fully develop and reach normal size. At present there is no vaccine or preventive treatment for Zika, nor cure for microcephaly. For more information on the effect of the Zika virus on humans please take a look at our Zika360 website (<https://vitalrecord.tamhsc.edu/zika360/>).

### HOW DO I GET ZIKA?

A person gets Zika from the bite of an infected mosquito. In turn, mosquitoes get the virus when they bite a person who is currently infected with the Zika virus. The best carrier (vector) of the Zika virus is a mosquito called the yellow fever mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*. Another closely related species, the Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, is also able to carry Zika virus—though we don't know the degree to which *Aedes albopictus* may be contributing to Zika virus transmission in the Americas. Both mosquitoes are common in Texas, and may be found in the same communities.



*Aedes albopictus* feeding

Since 2002, the most important mosquito-transmitted disease in Texas has been West Nile virus. West Nile virus is carried by a different mosquito, the southern house mosquito, *Culex quinquefasciatus*. Unlike the night flying *Culex* mosquitoes, *Aedes* mosquitoes are active throughout the day and into the evening. For this reason, it is now critical to protect against mosquito bites during both day and night.

In addition, under certain circumstances, Zika can be transmitted sexually from men to women. To date, this is the only way local transmission of Zika has occurred in the United States. In countries where Zika transmission occurs via mosquitoes, sexual transmission is a far less common means of spread than mosquitoes. For this reason, the US Centers for Disease Control recently recommended that women with confirmed cases of Zika, or who have experienced symptoms of the virus, wait at least eight weeks after the start of their symptoms before trying to get pregnant. Additionally, men with confirmed cases of Zika, or who have had symptoms of the virus, are now advised to wait at least six months after their symptoms begin before having unprotected sex. This information is based on the current best information on how long the Zika virus is known to remain active in the body and in semen.

### SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT ZIKA?

As of the writing of this fact sheet, there have been no locally transmitted cases of Zika virus by mosquitos to humans in Texas and the risk of Zika infection in Texas right now seems to be negligible. During the winter and early spring months, the principal risk is for travelers to areas where Zika is active. However, local transmission of Zika might be possible

during the active mosquito season (when average daily temperatures exceed 75 degrees F) and an increased number of people return to the State while infected. However, this risk is expected to remain low for most areas of Texas and your local health department, the Texas Department of State Health Services, and the local media are good sources to keep informed about changes in the risk of Zika transmission in your area. For the most current information on Zika in Texas visit the DSHS Zika website, <http://texaszika.org/>.

## **STOPPING ZIKA**

There are two steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting Zika or West Nile virus from a mosquito. First, you can make your home less likely to breed mosquitoes. Second, you can reduce your risk of a mosquito bite by changing your behavior and wearing mosquito repellent when you are outdoors.

All mosquitoes require bacteria-laden water in which to breed. *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes breed mostly in small water- and debris-filled containers like bottles and cans, buckets and wheel barrows, tarps, gutters, birdbaths, flower pot dishes, and tires. Any container capable of holding water for 8 to 10 days can produce dozens or hundreds of mosquitoes a day. Clean rainwater or irrigation water that fills a container with organic material (i.e. leaf debris, grass clippings) requires about four days to produce enough bacteria to sustain mosquito breeding. Because mosquitoes that carry Zika fly only short distances (less than 200 meters) from their larval breeding site, most of the biting mosquitoes in your backyard come either from containers in yours or your nearby neighbor's yard. For this reason, the first step to stopping Zika is to fill or eliminate any water containing containers around your home. For more information about mosquitoes and checking your yard for mosquito breeding sites, check out this website:

<http://mosquitosafari.tamu.edu>



Mosquitoes can bite any time when you are outdoors, even for short trips to water the garden or pull weeds. Anyone remaining outdoors for extended periods of time in mosquito infested areas should wear long-sleeves, long-pants and light-colored, loose-fitting clothing to prevent mosquitoes from biting. Skin applied repellents also can provide good protection from mosquito bites for 2 to 12 hours. DEET, picaridin, and IR-3535 are some of the better repellents for exposed skin; however for shorter exposure times many other effective products are available. For more information about choosing a repellent, check with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's repellent calculator:

<http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you>

## **PRECAUTIONS FOR TRAVELERS**

Because of its proximity to Mexico and other Latin American countries where Zika is common, Texas is one of the highest risk areas for Zika in the United States. Anyone traveling to and from areas where the Zika virus is present should take special precautions to avoid getting the virus, or spreading it to others. This includes avoiding mosquito infested areas, wearing long sleeved shirts and long pants when in mosquito prone areas, and using a good repellent. Besides being careful to avoid Zika when traveling, it's important to avoid passing on the Zika virus when returning home. Even travelers who feel well can pass on the Zika virus. Eighty percent of those who get Zika will not know they have been infected. To minimize this risk returning travelers should be especially careful to wear repellent for at least a week to avoid the possibility of introducing the virus to your community.

**For more information and links to resources: <http://preventingzika.org/>**