

ZIKA VIRUS & PREGNANCY FACT SHEET



UPDATED - 2 SEPTEMBER 2016

Should pregnant women be concerned about Zika?

- Yes. Zika can threaten the health of your unborn baby. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have confirmed the epidemiological link between the Zika virus, microcephaly (small head in infants) and Guillain-Barré syndrome (temporary paralysis).
- In pregnancy, transmission of Zika to the fetuses has been documented. Zika virus infection close to term (end of pregnancy) could potentially be transmitted during both pregnancy and at childbirth, although this has not been scientifically proven to date.
- Pregnant women in general, including those who develop symptoms of Zika virus infection, should see their health-care provider for close monitoring of their pregnancy.

If one or both partners have symptoms suggestive of the Zika virus, they should wait at least 6 months to conceive after symptoms have resolved.

What is microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome?

- Microcephaly is a rare condition where a baby has an abnormally small head. This is due to abnormal brain development of the baby in the womb or during infancy. Babies and children with microcephaly often have challenges with their brain development as they grow older.
- Microcephaly can also be caused by a variety of environmental and genetic factors such as Down syndrome; exposure to drugs, alcohol or other toxins in the womb; and also rubella infection during pregnancy. There is no specific treatment for microcephaly. Early intervention with stimulation and play programmes may show positive impacts on development. Family counselling and support for parents is also extremely important.

- Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks their peripheral nervous system. These are the nerves that control muscle movement as well as those that transmit feelings of pain, temperature and touch.

What should pregnant women do to reduce the risk of being infected with the Zika Virus?

In general the following precautionary measures can be adapted: Do everything you can to:

- Reduce mosquito breeding. The mosquitoes breed in anything which can hold water including discarded tyres, tin cans, bottles, flower pots, storage jars, cooling systems and manhole covers.
- Keep mosquitoes out of your house to prevent indoor mosquito bites by using screens if doors and windows are open.
- In addition, keeping windows closed, sleeping under a bed net during the day, wearing long sleeve clothing during the day when these mosquitoes are most active, and by using repellents contains 30%-50% DEET (DEET is not recommended to use on children under 6 months of age) applied to exposed skin or clothing can greatly reduce the chances of being bitten by an infected Aedes Aegypti Mosquito.

Pregnant women are especially advised to:

- 1) Postpone non-essential travel to areas where there is active Zika virus transmission
- 2) Take great caution against being bitten by the Aedes aegypti mosquito that carries the virus and
- 3) Adopt safe sex practice.

What are the Symptoms of the Zika virus?

- Symptoms include: fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting from several days to a week. The infection often presents itself as asymptomatic (showing no symptoms). About 1 in 5 people infected with Zika virus become ill (i.e. develop symptoms). Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon.

How soon do symptoms occur after the bite of an infected mosquito?

- About 4 days (can be 3-12 days) after being bitten by an infected mosquito the patient can start to exhibit the first signs and symptoms.

Should pregnant women get tested for the Zika Virus?

- Testing is done, only if you present with symptoms of the Zika virus (as currently recommended by WHO). *In Cayman, regardless of your travel history, you will be offered testing.

How is Zika Virus Infection diagnosed?

- Your healthcare provider may order blood tests to look for Zika or other similar viruses like dengue or chikungunya.
- See your healthcare provider if you develop the symptoms noted above.

What should pregnant women do if they have Zika Virus?

- There is no specific medicine or treatment for Zika virus infection. Your doctor may advise rest and drinking plenty of liquids, and will recommend appropriate medication for pain and fever. Fortunately, Zika virus infection is self-limiting and resolves with supportive therapy.
- Complications are rare.

Can mothers with Zika infection breastfeed their baby?

- Zika virus has been detected in breast milk but there is currently no evidence that the virus is transmitted to babies through breastfeeding.

Do pregnant women need an ultrasound?

- All pregnant women are required to have an ultrasound at different stages during a pregnancy.
- Microcephaly can sometimes be diagnosed during an ultrasound, but it may not be detectable until late in the second trimester or early in the third trimester of pregnancy.

If my baby does not have Microcephaly, does it mean my baby is fine?

- Research is still being done on the effects of the Zika virus in infants. There have been reports of other brain abnormalities in infants born with the Zika virus.

Can you get the Zika Virus Twice?

- No. Once you have had the Zika Virus your body becomes immune to the disease.

Is there a vaccine against Zika Virus?

- No vaccine or medications are available to prevent or treat Zika infections.

Protect yourself from Mosquito bites

Mosquitoes spread many types of viruses and parasites that can cause diseases like Zika, chikungunya, dengue, malaria and yellow fever.

The best way to **PREVENT** Zika and others is to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

- Use insect repellent** (Icon: Insect repellent bottle)
- Wear protective clothing** (Icon: Red shirt and blue pants)
- Practise safe sex, always** (Icon: Condoms)
- Mosquito proof your accommodation** (Icon: House with mosquito net)



For further information

Public Health Department

244-2621 or 244-2561

For advice on Mosquito Control

Mosquito Research and Control Unit

Grand Cayman 949-2557 - Cayman Brac 948-2223

Department of Environmental Health

Grand Cayman 949-6696 - Cayman Brac 948-2321