

CDC releases travel tips when visiting countries with Zika Virus

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SPRINGFIELD – Visiting friends and family in areas with Zika virus requires taking special health precautions because individuals may stay longer, be in places with fewer protections against mosquitoes (e.g. houses without screens or air conditioning), or be in familiar places where individuals may not take as many precautions to stay healthy.

“Illinois is a very diverse state where people born in other countries have come to call home, but who may frequently travel to their country of origin to visit friends and family,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director (IDPH) Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “We want to make sure that people traveling to countries where Zika virus is spreading have the facts so that they can protect themselves from becoming infected.”

Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has documented the spread of Zika virus in almost 50 countries and territories including Central and South Americas, and the Caribbean islands. To check if the country you may be visiting is experiencing Zika virus, check the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/active-countries.html>.

Zika virus is primarily spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Follow these steps to prevent mosquito bites:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use insect repellents that are registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and contain DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE), or para-menthane-diol. Always use as directed.
- Stay and sleep in screened-in and air-conditioned rooms whenever possible. Sleep under a mosquito bed net if air conditioned or screened rooms are not available or if sleeping outdoors.

Zika virus can also pass from a pregnant woman to her fetus and can cause serious birth defects. Pregnant women should not travel to any area with Zika virus. Those who must travel should talk with a healthcare provider before going, strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites, and use a condom or do not have sex.

Additionally, Zika virus can be spread through anal, oral, and vaginal sex. A man can pass Zika virus to his partner(s) even if he does not have symptoms at the time, or if his symptoms have gone away. While there is one documented case of Zika virus transmission from a woman to a man, more is still being learned. Condoms can reduce the chance of getting Zika virus from sex. All pregnant women with sex partners who live in or have traveled to an area with Zika should use condoms or not have sex during their pregnancy, even if their partners do not have Zika virus symptoms or if their symptoms have gone away. People who live in or have traveled to an area with Zika virus should consider using condoms to protect their sex partners-man or woman.

CDC has guidance for how long to wait before trying to get pregnant or have sex without a condom.

Possible exposure via recent travel or sex without a condom		
	Women	Men
Zika virus symptoms	Wait at least 8 weeks after symptoms start	Wait at least 6 months after symptoms start
No Zika virus symptoms	Wait at least 8 weeks after exposure	Wait at least 8 weeks after exposure. Talk with your healthcare provider
People living in areas with Zika virus		
	Women	Men
Zika virus symptoms	Wait at least 8 weeks after symptoms start	Wait at least 6 months after symptoms start
No Zika virus symptoms	Talk with doctor or healthcare provider	Talk with doctor or healthcare provider

Upon returning to Illinois, travelers should take precautions to prevent the spread of Zika virus, even if they don't think they have it. Travelers should watch for symptoms after returning home, call a healthcare provider immediately if they suspect Zika virus, use insect repellent for three weeks after travel, and use condoms during sex.

For more information, go to the IDPH website - <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/diseases-and-conditions/zika-cdc>.