

What Head Start or Child Care Programs Should Know About Zika Virus

What is Zika Virus?

Zika is a virus that is thought to spread to people through mosquito bites; there has also been at least one documented case of sexual transmission. The illness is usually mild, with symptoms lasting from several days to one week. About 1 in 5 people infected with Zika virus develop symptoms. Hospitalization is not common. Zika virus has been found in Mexico, several countries in Central and South America, and several islands in the Caribbean including Puerto Rico. A number of imported cases were recently diagnosed in the U.S.

What are the Symptoms of Zika Virus Infection?

The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are:

- Fever;
- Rash;
- Joint pain;
- Conjunctivitis (red eyes)

Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache.

How does Zika Virus Spread?

Zika virus is thought to be primarily transmitted through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes, the same mosquitoes that spread chikungunya and dengue. These mosquitoes are aggressive daytime biters, but also bite at night. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite a person already infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites. It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. There is a documented case of transmission of the Zika virus through sexual contact.

Who is at Risk?

Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found who has not already been infected is at risk for infection, including pregnant women. Zika virus also spreads through sexual contact.

How is Zika Virus Infection Diagnosed?

If a person develops symptoms, a healthcare provider may order blood tests to look for Zika virus or other similar viral diseases like dengue or chikungunya. If you have recently traveled, tell your healthcare provider.

How can Providers Limit the Spread of Zika Virus Infection?

- No vaccine exists to prevent Zika virus infection.
- Mosquitoes that spread the virus bite mostly during the day.
- Make sure there is no standing water near your center or play areas.
- Dress children in clothes that cover arms and legs when they're going outside.
- Stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
- Use EPA registered insect repellents.
 - Follow label instructions.
 - Reapply as directed.
- If you are using sunscreen – apply that first then put on the insect repellent.
- Spray insect repellent on your hands then put it on a child's face.
- Don't use insect repellent on babies younger than 2 months.
- Don't put insect repellent onto a child's hands, eyes, mouth, and cut or irritated skin.

How to talk to Children about Zika Virus?

- If children have questions, take time to listen and answer their questions.
- Be honest. Answer questions based on the facts and as age-appropriate.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice, using reassuring words.
- Assist parents and caregivers in keeping children up-to-date on their state EPSDT schedule.

Implications for Head Start and Child Care Programs

- Programs should review their emergency plans and staff availability to ensure adequate coverage, if needed

Where Can I Learn More?

- [EPA approved repellents](#)
- [Zika virus information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers on talking with children about infectious disease outbreaks](#)