

## Questions & answers for MOHS clients re the Zika virus

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** *This Q&A has been compiled using the latest information available from health authorities including the World Health Organisation. The WHO states there is currently no licensed medicine or vaccine for Zika virus.*

**MOHS is monitoring the virus outbreak and will provide regular updates.**

### Q1: What is the Zika virus?

The Zika virus is spread by mosquitoes, and isn't harmful in most cases. However, it may be harmful for pregnant women as it has been potentially linked to birth defects – specifically, abnormally small heads (microcephaly). Outbreaks have been reported in the Pacific region, and the virus has now spread to South and Central America; and the Caribbean.

### Q2: What symptoms does the Zika virus cause?

Most people don't have any symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they are usually mild and last around two to seven days and include a low grade fever, joint pain, itching, rash, conjunctivitis, headache and eye pain.

### Q3: How does the Zika virus spread?

Most cases of the Zika virus are spread by infected mosquitoes biting humans especially during mid morning and late afternoon to dusk. There has been one case where Zika virus may have occurred through sexual intercourse and a small number of cases have occurred by transmission from an expectant mother to her unborn child via the placenta.

### Q4: How do I reduce my risk of catching the Zika virus?

Before travelling, seek travel health advice from your GP/practice nurse or from a travel clinic ideally six to eight weeks before you go.

To reduce your risk of infection with Zika virus, you should avoid being bitten by mosquitos:

- use insect repellent that contains N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide (DEET) on exposed skin – the repellent is safe to use during pregnancy and should be applied to skin after sunscreen is applied
- wear loose clothing that covers your arms and legs
- sleep under a mosquito net in areas where malaria is also a risk

### Q4: What risks does the Zika virus pose in pregnancy?

There is evidence to suggest that pregnant women who contract the virus during pregnancy may have an increased risk of giving birth to a baby with microcephaly (this means an abnormally small head and can be associated with abnormal brain development).

Current advice is that women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, should discuss their travel plans with their doctor and, if already pregnant, consider postponing travel to any region where a known outbreak of the Zika virus is occurring.

# FACT SHEET

If travel is unavoidable then they should take scrupulous insect bite avoidance measures.

**Q5: I am pregnant and have visited a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak. What should I do?**

If you are pregnant and have a history of travel to a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak, even if you have not been unwell, or if you have experienced Zika symptoms either during or within two weeks of returning home, see your GP or midwife and mention your travel history, and they will discuss the risk with you and will arrange an ultrasound scan of your baby to monitor growth.

**Q6: I am trying to get pregnant and have visited a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak. What should I do?**

A: If you have experienced Zika symptoms either during or within two weeks of returning home it is recommended that you wait at least six months after full recovery before you try to conceive. Even if you have not been unwell, it is recommended that you wait at least 28 days after you return home from a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak before you try to conceive.

**Q7: My partner has visited a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak. Should I be concerned?**

A: Although sexual transmission of Zika virus has occurred, the risk is thought to be very low. If your partner has travelled to a country where there is an ongoing Zika virus outbreak, condom use is advised for 28 days after his return home if a) he had no Zika symptoms or b) for six months following recovery if he experienced Zika symptoms.

**Q8: What should I do if I am worried that my baby has been affected by the Zika virus?**

A: Seek advice from your midwife or doctor, or ask your GP to refer you for further counselling.

**Q9: How is the Zika virus diagnosed and treated?**

A: The Zika virus can be diagnosed with a blood test in those who are currently/actively displaying symptoms of infection. There is no specific treatment for the symptoms of the Zika virus. Drinking plenty of water and taking paracetamol may help relieve symptoms. If you feel unwell on return from a country with an ongoing outbreak of Zika virus, but which also has malaria, you should seek urgent (same day) advice to help rule out a diagnosis of malaria.

If you remain unwell and malaria has been shown not to be the cause, seek medical advice.

**Disclaimer: this fact sheet has been compiled for guidance only. MOHS cannot accept any responsibility should an employee become infected with the Zika virus. It is in the client's best interests to remain vigilant about the disease and to take every precaution to protect its workforce.**

For further information, email [info@mohs.co.uk](mailto:info@mohs.co.uk), visit [mohs.co.uk](http://mohs.co.uk) or call 0121 601 4041

Source: NHS Choices. Any further queries re the Zika virus, please visit the WHO website at [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)

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