

CITY OF BALTIMORE

STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE, Mayor



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Leana S. Wen, M.D., M.Sc., FAAEM
Commissioner of Health

1001 E. Fayette St.
Baltimore, MD 21202
Health.baltimorecity.gov

Zika Virus Q&A with the Health Commissioner

Q: What is Zika and why is there so much news about it?

A: Zika is a disease caused by Zika virus that is spread by mosquito bite. It has existed since 1947 in Africa and Asia, but has only been in the Americas since 2007. There is concern that Zika in Brazil has resulted in thousands of babies born with abnormally small heads and brain damage. In February 2016, the World Health Organization has declared Zika a global public health emergency. It has spread to more than 25 countries include in Central America and the Caribbean.

Q: What are the symptoms of Zika? Is there treatment or a vaccine?

A: Most people with Zika don't have symptoms at all. About 1 in 5 people will have symptoms such as fever, rash, joint pain, conjunctivitis (red eyes) or headaches. Most people will have a mild infection, which require no hospitalization and go away on their own. There is no anti-viral treatment and no vaccine to prevent from getting Zika at this time, though researchers are working hard to develop a vaccine against Zika.

Q: How is Zika transmitted?

A: Zika is transmitted through the bite of infected mosquitos. 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. Zika cannot be transmitted via casual contact (shaking someone's hand), but Zika can be transmitted through sexual contact. It can also be transmitted by blood transfusion and from a pregnant mother to her baby.

Q: Is Zika in Baltimore?

At the moment, there are no cases of Zika in Baltimore. However, there are now about 40 cases in the continental U.S. and 10 cases in the territories of Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. It is likely that a traveler infected with Zika could return to Baltimore. The Baltimore City Health Department is closely monitoring the situation with our state and federal partners.

Q: Should I worry that I will get Zika?

If you have traveled to an area with Zika virus, talk to your doctor about your risk for Zika virus infection. An updated list of countries with Zika can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html>. If you have not traveled recently to a country affected with Zika, you do not have Zika.

Q: If Zika is sexually transmitted, should I abstain from sex?

A: Zika can be passed from an infected man to a woman during sex. Men who have traveled to Zika areas, who have a pregnant partner, should abstain from sex or use condoms every time for the rest of her pregnancy.

Q: Should I get tested for Zika?

A: If you have not traveled to a country with Zika recently, and have not had sex with someone who has not traveled to one of those countries, then you do not have Zika. If you have traveled to one of these countries but are not pregnant, you do not need to get tested for Zika unless you have symptoms—then you can ask your doctor about testing. If you have traveled to these areas and are pregnant, even if you do not have symptoms, you should ask your doctor about testing.

Q: Should I travel?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is asking all pregnant women to consider postponing travel to areas with Zika transmission. If you must travel, talk to your doctor and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites. Women trying to become pregnant should speak with their doctors before traveling.

Q: How can I prevent from getting Zika?

A: Do not travel to a country with Zika transmission. If you are planning travel, the best way to avoid being infected is to prevent being bitten by mosquitoes. Mosquitos breed in standing water, so watch for areas of standing water and get rid of them. Always use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellent (<http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you>). Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Stay in places with air conditioning or that use screens on doors and windows.

Q: Where do I go for more information?

A: The Baltimore City Health Department has more information at <http://health.baltimorecity.gov/zika-virus>. You can follow us on Twitter at [@BMore_Healthy](https://twitter.com/BMore_Healthy). The CDC has comprehensive Zika information available at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/>. The situation with Zika is changing quickly, and we will be providing regular updates especially coming into the Spring and Summer months.

We invite all City staff to call-in to get further information about Zika on February 19, 2016 at 12PM. Please dial 605-562-3180 and enter code 117-245-291. You can submit questions in advance to bmoreheard@baltimorecity.gov.

Sincerely,



Leana Wen, M.D., M.Sc.
Commissioner of Health