

Zika Precautions for Women



Sonja L. Swiger, Extension Livestock/Veterinary Entomologist
Mike Merchant, Extension Urban Entomologist
 The Texas A&M University System

Women of childbearing age should be especially aware of a new disease called Zika (ZEE-kah). If you are pregnant when or soon after you contract Zika, your unborn baby may develop a severe birth defect known as *microcephaly* (my-kroh-SEF-uh-lee).

Microcephaly is a condition in which a baby has an unusually small head, often because the brain did not develop normally. Microcephaly can be fatal or cause mild to serious brain damage.

The most common way to contract Zika virus is from the bite of an infected mosquito. Two species of mosquitoes (Fig.1) spread the virus to people: the yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) and the Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*). Both are native to Texas.



Figure 1. The yellow fever mosquito (left) and Asian tiger mosquito (right) are carriers of the Zika virus. Source, left: USDAgov (CC BY 2.0)

Unlike West Nile virus and some other viruses spread by mosquitoes, Zika rarely causes serious illness or death. Four of five people who get Zika virus won't even know they are sick. Others may

have fever; joint pain; red, itchy eyes; and a rash that disappears within a week (Fig. 2). These symptoms typically occur 2 to 7 days after a bite from an infected mosquito.

Pregnant women and those who plan to become pregnant should take the following precautions to minimize their risk of contracting the disease.

1 Stay away from areas infested with Zika
 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises pregnant women to consider canceling travel to countries in Central America, South America, or the South Pacific, where Zika is common. If you contract Zika, you can infect others through the bite of a mosquito for about a week. For more information on travel precautions pertaining to Zika, see www.cdc.gov/zika.

2 Do not have sex with a recent visitor to a Zika-infested area
 It is also possible to catch Zika from a man who has recently contracted the virus. If your partner has traveled to a Zika-infested area lately, abstain from sex or use condoms for 6 months after his exposure, the period when Zika virus can survive in semen and infect a female or male partner.

3 Protect yourself from mosquitoes
 It may be possible to contract Zika from a mosquito in the United States. This method, called *local transmission*, is currently the rarest way to get Zika. Ask your local health authorities if Zika is or may be circulating in your community.

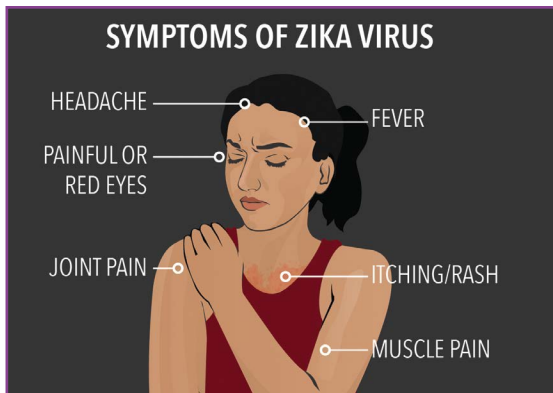


Figure 2. These symptoms of Zika Virus typically occur 2 to 7 days after a bite from an infected mosquito.

Source: Beth Herlin (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Prevent mosquito breeding around your home

The mosquitoes that spread Zika prefer to live in areas around people. Instead of streams, lakes, or marshes, these insects breed in water containers that can be as small as a bottle cap. Take these steps to reduce breeding sites:

- Drain or treat all standing water (Fig. 3).
- Clear the leaves from gutters.
- Dump out birdbaths and flowerpot drain dishes every week.
- Store buckets, boats, toys, wagons, and other containers so that they do not hold water.
- Screen cisterns and rain barrels to keep out mosquitoes.

Keep mosquitoes outside

- Make sure all your windows have screens that fit tightly and are in good condition.
- Instead of opening windows, use fans and air conditioning.
- For extra protection, spray an insecticide containing a pyrethroid onto the outsides of your door and window frames to kill any mosquitoes that rest there.

Protect yourself outdoors

- Wear long pants and loose-fitting shirts with long sleeves.
- Use a mosquito repellent that contains DEET, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (para-menthane-3,8-diol), or picaridin.

These ingredients prevent mosquitoes from biting for varying lengths of time. The CDC has found that they are safe to use if you follow the directions on the label.

Insect repellents are much less likely to harm adults or children than are Zika or other mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile virus.



Figure 3. Drain or treat all standing water to prevent mosquito breeding around your home. Source: Sonja L. Swiger

When applying repellent to children, follow these precautions:

- Do not apply insect repellents to babies under 2 months old.
- Do not apply oil of lemon eucalyptus to children under 3 years old.
- Do not apply insect repellents directly to the face or hands of children; adults should apply it to their hands and then wipe it onto the child's face and hands.
- Wash children's hands and faces after returning indoors or before eating.

For help in choosing a repellent, see **Find the Insect Repellent that is Right for You** by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at <https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you>.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu

More Extension publications can be found at *AgriLifeBookstore.org*

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal access in its programs, activities, education, and employment, without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.