

# Zika virus: what we do and don't know

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## About Zika virus

- Zika virus is spread mostly by the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The mosquitoes that can spread the virus are not normally found in New Zealand, but they are found in many countries around the world.
- The incubation period between being infected with the virus and the onset of symptoms is 3 to 12 days.
- Only about 1 in 5 people infected with Zika virus will develop symptoms.
- When symptoms are present, they are mild and can last 4 to 7 days. Most common symptoms include low grade fever, rash, red eyes and joint pain.
- There is currently no vaccine to prevent Zika virus disease.
- There is no medicine to treat Zika. Symptoms of Zika virus disease can be treated with rest, water, and paracetamol for pain and fever. **Do not use aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen until a health professional has ruled out dengue as a potential cause of illness.**
- In a small number of cases, Zika virus infection has been linked to a rare immune complication called Guillain-Barré syndrome which can result in acute paralysis. Guillain-Barré syndrome can be serious although most people are known to recover.

## Zika virus in pregnancy

### What we know

- Zika virus can be passed from a mother to her fetus during pregnancy.
- Infection with Zika virus during pregnancy is linked to birth defects in babies.

### What we don't know

- Whether the risk for the fetus is the same regardless of whether the pregnant mother infected with Zika virus experiences symptoms or not.
- What the risk of birth defects is in the different stages of pregnancy, and if there is a safe time during pregnancy to be in an area with Zika virus transmission.
- If you are present in an area with Zika virus transmission and are infected, how likely it is that the virus will infect your fetus and, if your baby will have birth defects from the infection.
- Whether the risk to the fetus is different if the virus is transmitted sexually rather than through the bite of a mosquito.

# Sexual transmission of Zika virus

## What we know

- Zika virus can be spread by a man to his sex partners through unprotected sex.
- In known cases of likely sexual transmission, the men had symptoms of Zika virus disease.
- The virus can be present in semen longer than in blood.
- Condom use and abstinence are effective ways to prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus.

## What we don't know

- How long the virus is present in semen in men who have had Zika virus, and how long the virus may be able to be transmitted.
- If infected men who do not develop symptoms can have the virus present in their semen, and whether they can transmit Zika through unprotected sex.
- If a woman can transmit Zika virus to her sex partners.
- Which unprotected sexual practices are at risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus.



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