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6 things to know about Zika



A health ministry employee fumigates a home against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito to prevent the spread of the Zika virus in El Salvador. (Marvin Recinos/AFP/Getty Images)

With a handful of Zika cases [being confirmed in the U.S.](#) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [issuing travel warnings](#) for countries where the virus is spreading, here are six things to know about Zika:

It's spread by mosquitos

Zika is transmitted by infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos biting people, [according to the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

This type of mosquito, which can also transmit dengue and chikungunya, is usually out biting during the day, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) says. They become common in the U.S. once the temperature hits between 50 and 60 degrees, [CNN](#) reported.

Zika usually causes mild symptoms

A lot of people who have been infected with Zika probably don't know they had it. Only about one in five people get symptoms, which are generally things like fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes, the [CDC](#) says.

At least five people are thought to have died from the virus in Brazil – but that's out of an estimated 440,000 to 1.3 million cases, according to numbers reported by [Public Radio International \(PRI\)](#) and [CBS News](#).

Zika may be linked to birth defects – but that's not a sure thing

Researchers in Brazil are investigating a possible link between Zika and microcephaly, which the [CDC](#) says is a birth defect where a baby's

head is much smaller than expected because the brain either hasn't developed properly or has stopped growing.

That research was prompted by a huge increase in microcephaly cases in Brazil – close to 4,000 babies have been born with the defect since October – about five months after [Brazil's first Zika cases surfaced](#) – compared to less than 150 in 2014, [PRI reported](#). Scientists don't have enough evidence to say Zika definitely causes microcephaly, but they're finding more evidence suggesting the two are linked, [Reuters reported](#).

Even though the link between Zika and microcephaly isn't certain, there's been a lot of concern over pregnant women getting the virus. The [CDC issued a travel alert](#) for the places [Zika transmission has been confirmed](#) and recommended pregnant women consider delaying travel to those countries “out of an abundance of caution.” And on Thursday, El Salvador recommended women delay getting pregnant until at least 2018 due to Zika's spread, [Reuters reported](#).

Link to rare neurological condition being investigated, too

Brazilian officials have also noticed a surge in [Guillain-Barré](#), a rare, potentially life-threatening disorder where the immune system attacks the body and temporarily causes paralysis. There have been at least 554 cases of this disorder reported in northeastern Brazil, which has also been hit hard by Zika, [The New York Times reported](#). The CDC is assisting Brazil's health agency to investigate whether there's a link between the two – but both agencies also stressed there's not yet evidence to confirm a link.

Zika could spread in the U.S., but hasn't yet

So far, the handful of Zika cases in the U.S. [have only been in travelers](#) who got the virus in another country.

But health experts say it's likely Zika will eventually start spreading in the United States, [CBS News reported](#).

“The mosquitoes are here,” Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, told CBS. “They're certainly not as abundant in the winter months as they are in the spring, but there are probably a fair number of people here who have visited the Caribbean or Latin America who are already infected with Zika virus. Our mosquitoes are going to bite those individuals, pick up the virus, and transmit it to another person.”

To protect yourself from Zika, keep mosquito bites at bay

There isn't a vaccine to protect people from the Zika virus, so the best way to avoid an infection is to prevent mosquito bites, the [CDC says](#).

Specifically, the agency recommends using bug repellent and wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants when possible. To keep mosquitos getting in from outside, use screens or keep doors and windows closed and turn on the air conditioning.

Also, make sure there's no standing water where the bugs can breed. For instance, pay attention to water pooling in spots like birdbaths and garbage can lids, and dump standing water onto the ground at least once a week, Laura D. Kramer, a public health professor at State University of New York at Albany, [told CNN](#).

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