

Why is an Infertility Specialist Concerned about the Zika Virus?

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Since its discovery, the Zika virus has been reported in every form of medical news media available. As the understanding of the virus increases, the guidelines on protection against transmitting the

virus to other individuals are refined. It is important for anyone planning to become pregnant, to understand the risks of traveling to areas where the Zika virus has been discovered.

What is Zika?

Zika Virus is a disease caused by the bite of an infected Aedes species mosquito. This species of mosquitos are known to bite during the day and at night. Zika Virus may also be spread by an infected person, during sex, or from a pregnant woman to her unborn child. It is important to note that the Zika virus may be spread, even if the infected person has no signs or symptoms of infection. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting 2 to 7 days after contracting the virus. Some symptoms include fever, skin rash, conjunctivitis (red eyes), muscle and joint pain or headache.

Complications of Zika

Zika virus can lead to fetal malformations, fetal microcephaly (small head and brain), and other neurological disorders in babies. In addition, Zika virus is associated with higher rates of miscarriage, stillbirth, and many other birth defects. There have also been increased reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome, an uncommon sickness of the nervous system, in men and women contracting the virus.

How to Protect Yourself Against Zika Virus

The best forms of prevention are to avoid mosquito bites and to refrain from sexual contact with anyone who may be at risk for Zika virus.

- If pregnant, do not travel to an area with known Zika Virus.
- If attempting pregnancy, avoid travel to an area with known Zika.
- Couples choosing to travel to an area with known Zika virus should use an effective method of contraception (to prevent pregnancy) and condoms (to decrease the risk of transmission) for 2-6 months after travel (see below).

When planning any type of travel, it is also important to review the most up to date information on areas impacted by the Zika virus. This information is available on the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) website: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information. Your primary healthcare provider can provide information on ways to protect yourself from potential mosquito bites.

How does the Zika virus impact individuals/couples desiring to become pregnant?

Due to the increased risk of complications, the CDC recommends that patients who may have been exposed to the Zika virus wait to attempt pregnancy. The length of time is different for men and women.

- Couples who include a male partner who has been diagnosed with Zika or who has had symptoms, or has traveled to an area with known Zika virus should abstain from sexual contact or only have protected sexual contact (vaginal, oral, anal) for 6 months.
- Couples who include a female partner who

has been diagnosed with Zika or who has had symptoms, or has traveled to an area with known Zika virus should abstain from sexual contact or only have protected sexual contact (vaginal, oral, anal) for 8 weeks.

The CDC recommends Zika virus testing for individuals:

- Who may have been exposed to the Zika virus through sex AND have Zika symptoms.
- All pregnant women who traveled to an area with known Zika or had sex with someone who lives in or traveled to an area with known Zika should be tested even if she does not have symptoms

Unfortunately, the test is only able to confirm if an individual is infected with the Zika virus.

Scientists continue to learn about the Zika virus and the impact it has on humans. To date, no vaccine is available and no cure has been found for the virus. Fertility specialists honor the CDC recommendations and will not start fertility treatments during the at risk time frame to prevent a child being born with abnormalities that could be averted by waiting the suggested time period. Some patients may be able to utilize the delay to complete any testing required by the physician. Patients should weigh the pros and cons of traveling and how it impacts their desire to grow their family. It is important to speak to your health care provider if have recently traveled or are planning to travel to an area with known Zika virus. **WJ**

For additional information about the Zika Virus, log on to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/zika/comm-resources/index.html.



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