



TRAVEL ADVISORY TO PREVENT THE IMPORTATION AND SPREAD OF ZIKA VIRUS INTO SOUTH AFRICA

On 01 February 2016, the World Health Organization declared the recent cluster of microcephaly cases and other neurologic disorders associated with Zika virus that have been reported in Brazil and other South American countries, a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Zika virus is implicated in causing microcephaly (i.e. baby born with smaller than normal head) as well as mental and growth abnormalities in babies born to mothers, that were infected with the virus, during pregnancy.

Of key concern to South Africa is the risk posed to pregnant women travelling to infected countries. Because there is neither vaccine nor specific treatment available, the national Department of Health recommends that all pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. If a pregnant woman travels to an area with Zika virus transmission she is advised to strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites.

As part of enhanced precautionary measures to prevent occurrence or spread of Zika virus into the country, the Department of Health has issued this travel advisory.

1. What is Zika virus infection?

Zika is a disease caused by Zika virus that is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito.

3. What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Zika fever are usually mild and include an acute onset of fever, rash, joint and muscle pain, conjunctivitis and headache. About 1 in 4 infected persons are symptomatic. Symptoms are self-limited and may persist for 2-7 days.

2. How is it transmitted?

Zika is primarily transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes, the same mosquitoes that spread Chikungunya and dengue. These mosquitoes are aggressive daytime biters and they can also bite at night. 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. It can also be transmitted from a pregnant mother to her baby during pregnancy or around the time of birth. Otherwise, the virus cannot be spread from person to person.

4. Who is at risk of Zika infection?

Anyone who is living in or travelling to an area where Zika virus is found who has not already been infected with Zika virus is at risk for infection, including pregnant women.

5. What are the risks for the Zika virus being introduced into South Africa?

There has never been a case of Zika in South Africa.

To date, Zika virus has never been found further south than Uganda in Africa. The vector species, *Aedes aegypti* is common in South Africa, particularly in the eastern coastal plain

but also in the cities of the inland plateau. In the urban centres, the mosquito breeds in small collections of water such as discarded tyres and buckets, or the leaf axils of *Strelitzia nicolae* ("banana trees").

Even though the possibility of an infected traveller introducing Zika virus to South Africa does exist, the short viraemic period (virus present in blood) would lessen the chance of the virus being transferred to a susceptible mosquito. Local mosquito species is also unlikely to transmit the virus.

6. What can people do to prevent being infected with Zika Virus

Since there is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika virus disease, prevention of mosquito bites is critical.

Pregnant women should delay travel to areas with current outbreaks of Zika virus.

Travellers are advised to take precautionary measures to prevent mosquito bites by:

- Wearing long-sleeved clothing when going out at night.
- Applying an insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin.
- Sleeping under mosquito-proof bed nets treated with an approved insecticide.
- Spraying the inside of their house or rooms with an insecticide after closing doors and windows.
- Staying and sleeping in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms.
- Eliminate all mosquito breeding sites

7. Testing for Zika Virus

Testing for the Zika virus is available at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and will be performed only on returning travellers with an illness compatible with Zika. Laboratory testing will be offered to all pregnant women who have travelled to an area with a current outbreak of Zika. This will be done in consultation with their attending obstetricians.

8. Pay attention to your health after you return to South Africa from a Zika virus affected area, by doing the following:

- a. Inform the Port Health official of your travel history on arrival in South Africa;
- b. Monitor your health for 12 days if you were in an area with Zika virus outbreak.
- c. Seek medical care immediately at your nearest health facility; if you develop an acute onset of fever, rash, joint and muscle pain, conjunctivitis and headache. About 1 in 4 infected persons are symptomatic. Symptoms are self-limited and may persist for 2-7 days. Tell the doctor about your recent travel and your symptoms - this notice will help the doctor make an accurate diagnosis and provide the appropriate care for you.

Send all travel related queries to:

National Department of Health, Nathoc1@health.gov.za and Nathoc2@health.gov.za
Tel: 012 395 9637 9636 or 012 395 9637

For more information visit: www.nicd.ac.za www.who.int www.cdc.gov



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