

ZIKA VIRUS

Zika virus is an emerging mosquito-borne virus that was first identified in humans in 1952 in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Outbreaks of Zika virus disease have been recorded in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. Zika virus disease is caused by a virus transmitted primarily by *Aedes* mosquitoes. People with Zika virus disease can have symptoms that can include mild fever, skin rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise or headache. These symptoms normally last for 2-7 days. There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites.

During large outbreaks in French Polynesia and Brazil in 2013 and 2015 respectively, national health authorities reported potential neurological and auto-immune complications of Zika virus disease. Recently in Brazil, local health authorities have observed an increase in Guillain-Barré syndrome (a neurologic disorder with numbness in limbs and weakness) which coincided with Zika virus infections in the general public, as well as an increase in babies born with microcephaly in northeast Brazil. Substantial new research has strengthened the association between Zika infection and the occurrence of fetal malformations and neurological disorders. However, more investigation is needed to better understand the relationship. Other potential causes are also being investigated.

Zika virus diagnosis can only be confirmed by laboratory testing for the presence of Zika virus RNA in the blood or other body fluids, such as urine or saliva.

Travelers' should take the basic precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites. This can be done by using insect repellent regularly; wearing clothes (preferably light-colored) that cover as much of the body as possible; installing physical barriers such as window screens in buildings, closed doors and windows; and if needed, additional personal protection, such as sleeping under mosquito nets during the day.

Repellents should contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide), IR3535 (3-[N-acetyl-N-butyl]-aminopropionic acid ethyl ester) or icaridin (1-piperidinecarboxylic acid, 2-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-methylpropylester). Product label instructions should be strictly followed. Special attention and help should be given to those who may not be able to protect themselves adequately, such as young children, the sick or elderly.