

Mosquito season has arrived and concerns about Zika virus infection will likely ramp up with it. I wanted to provide some very basic information about Zika virus and make you aware of current local and state-wide public health efforts to address Zika virus. The main reason I'm writing is to make myself available to you for any questions you might have.

Current Zika situation:

To date, there are no reports of any mosquito borne transmission of Zika virus within the Commonwealth of Virginia, or the continental US. All reported US cases of Zika are travelers returning from Zika active areas. Therefore, there is a risk of Zika virus being imported into Virginia and being transmitted by local mosquitoes during mosquito season.

Public Health Zika Preparedness Plan

We're still in preparedness/prevention mode, which means our primary public role at this stage will be to provide accurate information about how to prevent mosquito bites and advise homeowners how to reduce mosquito breeding around their homes. The State Health Department will begin state-wide Zika messaging soon; the Piedmont Health district will provide messaging that is locally relevant, primarily through newspaper and radio and will provide information related to: general information about Zika virus, Mosquito bite prevention, and household mosquito control.

Other health department duties include the following, but may expand if the situation warrants:

- Submit Zika-related specimens to the state lab for testing, as needed, and provide guidance to healthcare providers.
- Conduct epidemiological investigations related to Zika when a case is identified, including monitoring contacts and taking measures to minimize the risk of disease spread.
- Share relevant information with VDH Central Office, as appropriate.
- Serve as resource for local governments, local hospitals, providers, emergency responders, and the public with questions about Zika.

Zika virus basics:

- Zika virus is primarily spread to people through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. It is most commonly transmitted by the yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegyptii*), but the Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) can also transmit it. Both of these mosquito species circulate in Virginia, with Asian tiger mosquitoes being the most common nuisance mosquito here.
- Zika virus can also be transmitted during sex, but the likelihood of Zika virus spreading during sex is not known. To date, all reported cases of sexual transmission of Zika virus have been from symptomatic male partners.

- Most people infected with Zika won't even know they have it because they won't have any symptoms. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. The most common symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes).
- There is currently no vaccine for Zika virus.

Health Risks from Zika virus infection:

- Infection with Zika during pregnancy is linked to birth defects in babies, including microcephaly (a condition in which a baby's head is smaller than expected), but the degree of risk of a poor pregnancy outcome is currently unknown. In other words, Zika virus infection in a mother does not definitely mean a poor pregnancy outcome will occur. Pregnant women are highly discouraged from traveling to Zika-infected areas (Central and South America and the Caribbean).
- In other past Zika virus outbreaks, there have been reports of neurologic syndromes, such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS), in a small number of patients. GBS symptoms include weakness of the arms and legs that is usually the same on both sides of the body. In some cases, the muscles of the face that control eye movement or swallowing may also become weak. In the most serious cases, this muscle weakness can affect breathing, and people sometimes need a breathing tube to help them breathe. The link between Zika virus infection and GBS is still being studied.