

TOOLBOX TALKS

A Quality Service Contractors Publication for Members

March 2016

About Zika Virus Disease



Zika virus disease (Zika) is a disease caused by Zika virus that is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week after being bitten by an infected mosquito. People usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika. For this reason, many people might not realize they have been infected. Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

Zika virus was first discovered in 1947 and is named after the Zika forest in Uganda. In 1952, the first human cases of Zika were detected and since then, outbreaks of Zika have been reported in tropical Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Zika outbreaks have probably occurred in many locations. Before 2007, at least 14 cases of Zika had been documented, although other cases were likely to have occurred and were not reported. Because the symptoms of Zika are similar to those of many other diseases, many cases may not have been recognized.

In May 2015, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued an alert regarding the first confirmed Zika virus infection in Brazil and on Feb 1, 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Zika virus a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). Local transmission has been reported in many other countries and territories. Zika virus likely will continue to spread to new areas.

Specific areas with ongoing Zika virus transmission <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/index.html> are often difficult to determine and are likely to change over time. If traveling, please visit the CDC Travelers' Health site <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information> for the most updated travel information.



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WHO calls Zika virus global health emergency. Is it a workplace emergency?

By Ana Ellington, Legal Editor

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently declared the Zika virus and its suspected link to brain-damaged babies a public health emergency of international concern. The main concern is a link to microcephaly—a condition that causes babies to be born with unusually small heads and, in the vast majority of cases, damaged brains.

The declaration, made by WHO Director Margaret Chan, will trigger funding for research to try to establish whether the Zika virus, which is spread by mosquitoes, is responsible for the large numbers of babies born with these birth defects in Brazil. The virus has spread to more than 20 countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Chan called the birth of thousands of babies with microcephaly “an extraordinary event and a public health threat to other parts of the world.” Although Zika has been known to science for decades, it's only now being seen as a major public health danger because of the link to microcephaly if pregnant women are exposed to the virus.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Zika is not transmitted by casual contact from person to person. The only two documented cases of person-to-person Zika transmission are where there was an exchange of blood or bodily fluids in childbirth or sexual activity.

Zika causes no symptoms and leads to no lasting harm to most people. Only one in five people infected with the virus develop symptoms, which can include fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes, the CDC said.

Should U.S. employers be concerned?

According to the CDC, at least a dozen cases have been confirmed in the United States—all people who had traveled to countries already hit by the virus. However, the *Aedes* mosquito, which carries the virus, is expected to reach the United States quickly.

Industries that could potentially be impacted by the Zika virus include healthcare providers and first responders, who could be exposed to blood and bodily fluids, and outdoors workers, who could be exposed to mosquito bites.



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Employers covered under OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens (BBP) standard are required to have a program, protections, and training for employees who are occupationally exposed to blood or specific bodily fluids. If your organization has a BBP program, you should review the program for any issues arising specifically from Zika that are not already included in the program.

The best way to prevent the disease spread by mosquitoes is to avoid being bit. Here is how outdoors workers can avoid being bit:



- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents. All EPA-registered insect repellents are evaluated for effectiveness.
 - Always follow the product label instructions.
 - Reapply insect repellent as directed.
 - Do not spray repellent on the skin under clothing.
 - If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent.
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items.
 - Treated clothing remains protective after multiple washings. See product information to learn how long the protection will last.
 - If treating items yourself, follow the product instructions carefully.
 - Do NOT use permethrin products directly on skin. They are intended to treat clothing.

Most important is to train employees on the Zika virus.

- What is the Zika virus?
- What are the symptoms of Zika virus?
- How is it spread?
- Who is at risk of being infected?

To help you educate your workers, the CDC has an informative Zika virus Q&A page at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/disease-qa.html>.



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