



St. Norbert College Health and Wellness Services

Zika Virus Update

The Zika virus outbreak in Central and South America and Mexico is an evolving public health situation. The virus is also known to circulate in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. As of March 23, 2016, no travel associated cases of Zika disease have been identified in Wisconsin. There are 273 US travel-related Zika disease cases reported and of these 19 are in pregnant women and 6 were sexually transmitted.

In order to prevent further infection in U.S. territories, such as Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the CDC developed a Zika protection kit. This includes educational materials about Zika, insect repellent, condoms, a thermometer, and tablets that can be put into standing water to prevent mosquitoes from hatching there (www.cdc.gov/zika). The Zika virus is spread through mosquito bites and through sexual contact with someone infected with the virus. Symptoms of infection include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). Most people have very mild to no symptoms, however infected pregnant women can pass it on to their unborn babies, which is believed to cause microcephaly (small head and small brain). It has not been determined in which trimester the greatest danger for the fetus occurs, but early pregnancy may be most vulnerable. Although there is no vaccine or medication available, research is moving ahead to develop a vaccine.

The best protection against the Zika virus is preventing exposure to mosquitos and sexual abstinence or barrier protected sexual contact with anyone who may have been exposed. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites, such as wearing long sleeves and pants while outside and applying mosquito repellent (with DEET or EPA-registered insect repellent, such as Off, Cutter, Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus, Repel, etc.).

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have issued travel alerts to Central and South America for pregnant women and those considering pregnancy. In addition, sexual activity with anyone who may have traveled to the endemic area should include barrier protection. Women who are pregnant or intending to become pregnant are advised to postpone travel to any of the identified areas.

Sexual transmission:

Zika virus can be spread during sex by a man infected with Zika to his partners.

In known cases of sexual transmission, the men had Zika symptoms. From these cases, we know the virus can be spread when the man has symptoms, before symptoms start, and after symptoms end.

The virus can stay in semen longer than in blood. It may be possible for a man to carry Zika and give it to his partner(s) through sex, even when he does not have symptoms, or know that he is infected. Couples with a male partner who lives in or traveled to an area with Zika that are concerned about sexual transmission of Zika should consider using a condom every time they have vaginal, anal and oral sex, or decide to not have sex. To be effective, condoms must be used correctly from start to finish, every time during sex.

Couples who are pregnant:

Zika virus can be spread by a man to his partner during sex. It may be possible for a man to carry Zika and give it to his partner(s) through sex, even when he does not have symptoms, or know that he is infected. Because of the link between Zika and birth defects, take steps to prevent infection during your pregnancy. Couples with male partners who live in or travel to areas with Zika, can take steps to protect the pregnancy.

To prevent spreading Zika through sex, couples should use a condom every time they have sex or not have sex during the pregnancy. To be effective, condoms must be used correctly from start to finish, every time you have sex

Not having sex is the only way to be sure that you do not get Zika virus from sex.

Both men and women should also take steps to prevent mosquito bites while in an area with Zika to prevent further spread of the virus. Even if they do not feel sick, travelers returning to the United States from an area with Zika should take steps to prevent mosquito bites for 3 weeks so they do not spread Zika to uninfected mosquitoes.

Couples who are concerned that the male partner may have or had Zika should tell their healthcare provider about:

His travel history

How long he stayed

If he took steps to prevent mosquito bites

If you had sex without a condom

For more information, please go to the CDC webpage www.cdc.gov/zika and the World Health Organization webpage www.who.org

This statement was released on: March 30, 2016.