Public Health Update on Zika Virus

Zika Virus

In early 2015, Brazil began reporting the first local cases of Zika virus. The virus, which was discovered in Uganda in 1947, quickly spread across South and Central America, and now has rising transmission rates across South and Central Americas and Mexico. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Travel Alert Level 2 for pregnant women recently. In an effort to keep our community informed, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department will be providing updates with new information as it becomes available.

Zika virus is primarily spread to people through bites from mosquitoes. In pregnant women, the virus can cause microcephaly and brain damage in the fetus. 80% of people infected with Zika virus are asymptomatic, but the fetus can still be affected. Brazil is currently experiencing an unprecedented number of infants born with brain abnormalities and many of them are believed to be linked to Zika virus infection during the mother’s pregnancy.

Symptoms of Zika virus usually appear within one week of infection and include fever, rash, joint pain, conjunctivitis (red eyes), muscle pain, and headache. The illness is usually mild and lasts up to one week. Deaths are rare. There is no vaccine and no treatment other than supportive care for symptoms.

Transmission by Mosquitoes

Zika virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes species mosquito. These mosquitoes are aggressive day biters, so the usual precautions of avoiding outdoor activities during dusk and dawn will be less effective in preventing bites. Precautions must be taken during the day and include:

- Using EPA-registered insect repellents. This is safe in pregnant women
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants
- Use air conditioning and window/door screens
- Empty standing water from containers such as flower pots or water buckets

Travelers

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that pregnant women postpone travel to countries where the virus has been identified. For an updated list of these countries, please see the link below.

Pregnant women returning from a country with Zika virus transmission should see their prenatal care provider. If no Zika virus symptoms are present, a screening ultrasound for microcephaly and brain calcifications may be needed. Serial ultrasounds throughout the pregnancy may be
recommended, as it is unclear at what gestational age the brain abnormalities manifest. If symptoms are present in a pregnant woman who has recently traveled to a Zika-endemic country, a blood test for Zika virus needs to be immediately performed. Providers should call Disease Control to coordinate specimens being sent to the state and the CDC.

**Santa Barbara County Residents**

There are no current reports of the two non-native *Aedes* mosquitoes in Santa Barbara County. These mosquito species have been detected in other counties in California, including Los Angeles County and adjacent Kern County. Vector Control is working diligently to monitor local mosquito species. There have been no reported cases of Zika virus transmission in California.

**Resources:**
- California Department of Public Health's *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* Mosquitoes webpage
- Mosquito and Vector Management District Santa Barbara County’s [webpage](http://www.mosquitoes.org) and [handout](http://www.mosquitoes.org)

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