



## Zika

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As the mercury rises, so does the Texas mosquito population. This year, Dallas County has already reported several cases of West Nile Virus, and Texas recently had its first suspected case of local exposure to Zika Virus in Hidalgo County. It may surprise you to learn that mosquitoes, with the diseases they carry, are the most deadly creature on the planet. And while malaria, the biggest offender, is not currently an issue in the U.S., Chikungunya, West Nile, Yellow Fever, Dengue, and, of course, Zika are still a potential concern.

Texas is particularly vulnerable to mosquito-borne illnesses, because of its location and climate. Texas has no off-season and we are currently approaching the peak of mosquito season. Zika is particularly problematic because it usually includes no symptoms, making it hard to track, and causes devastating neural abnormalities to babies exposed prenatally. Recently, a [study \(https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2017/05/15/200974/study-finds-knowledge-gaps-among-pregnant-women-as-texas-prepares-for-more-zika-cases/\)](https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2017/05/15/200974/study-finds-knowledge-gaps-among-pregnant-women-as-texas-prepares-for-more-zika-cases/) done by the U.T. Medical Branch (UTMB) Galveston surveying pregnant women in Southeast Texas discovered that many pregnant women were lacking knowledge in several aspects of Zika and that public education is exceedingly important in stopping the spread of Zika.

One area where pregnant women needed more information was on transmission of Zika. In fact, less than half of the women surveyed knew that Zika Virus was a sexually transmitted infection. Zika virus has no symptoms in 4 out of 5 people, so having sex with someone who traveled to an area with local transmission, can spread the virus without showing a symptom or clue that anyone has been infected.

As a result, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending that any pregnant woman who has a partner who has gone to an area with local Zika transmission, use a condom for the duration of the pregnancy, regardless of whether or not there are symptoms in either person. Furthermore, anyone who is attempting to get pregnant should wait until the virus has cleared their system before conception. Women must wait 8 weeks after possible exposure before becoming pregnant. Men, however, need to wait a full six months in order to ensure the virus has completely cleared from their body before they attempt to have a baby.

Due to a lack of symptoms in this virus, the CDC uses travel history to determine if a person has a potential exposure to Zika virus. During the UTMB survey, they discovered that most pregnant women knew that they must be careful about traveling to certain areas where they may be exposed to Zika. However, most women did not actually know where those areas were. In the U.S., we have a few cases of local transmission of Zika, with the bulk of Zika cases being travel related, meaning the individual traveled to an area with local transmission.

## Texas Parent to Parent

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So, where is widespread transmission occurring? To find out more, check out the [CDC's Zika Travel Information \(https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information\)](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information) webpage. It includes a general overview of travel risk. It also allows people to input the specific location where they will travel and find more detailed information about the risk of Zika exposure there. Generally, areas that are closer to the Equator have a higher risk of Zika transmission. This includes areas in the Caribbean, South America, Africa, and Asia.

Another issue discovered in the UTMB Study is that only 40% of women surveyed were using mosquito repellent. Almost half of those who did not use mosquito repellent did so because they were worried about using it during pregnancy. Women might be reluctant to use any chemical during the nine months while their baby is growing. However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined more than once that DEET is safe and unlikely to be a problem for a pregnant woman or her baby. In fact, when comparing the potential problems when using DEET and the potential brain abnormalities for an infant born with Congenital Zika Virus Syndrome, doctors and scientists agree that the benefits outweigh the risks.

WebMD produced a [video \(http://www.webmd.com/baby/video/safe-bug-sprays-during-pregnancy-2016\)](http://www.webmd.com/baby/video/safe-bug-sprays-during-pregnancy-2016) explaining to pregnant women about the safety of DEET when applied correctly and how to use mosquito repellent safely while pregnant. Also, staying indoors, using mosquito nets, wearing long sleeves and pants, and using permethrin-treated clothing can help prevent the exposure to the Zika virus. If cost is a factor, individuals with Medicaid, CHIP, and CHIP Perinatal can get up to two cans per month of free mosquito repellent at their local pharmacy without a prescription. Measures to [prevent mosquitoes \(https://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/LowLit\\_FS\\_WhatToKnow.pdf\)](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/LowLit_FS_WhatToKnow.pdf) in your community, like dumping out standing water and using mosquito dunks, can also help prevent the spread of Zika in Texas.

Due to the nature of the mosquitoes that transmit Zika, it has spread rapidly through communities in South America. While currently most of the cases in the United States are travel-related, we are primed for widespread Zika transmission. With the potential of mosquitoes year round and travel hubs in Austin, Dallas, Houston and along the border, Zika could strike in our communities. Prevention is the key to protecting babies from the devastating effects of Congenital Zika Virus Infection and keeping Zika out of our communities. To learn more about Zika [transmission \(https://www.cdc.gov/zika/transmission/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/transmission/index.html) and [prevention \(https://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention/protect-yourself-and-others.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention/protect-yourself-and-others.html), check out the [CDC's Zika Virus web page \(https://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html?s\\_cid=Zika-OADC-Search-Google-001&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIn8mAjM-1QIVTySBCh1YlwgsEAAAYASAAEgKNfPD\\_BwE\)](https://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html?s_cid=Zika-OADC-Search-Google-001&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIn8mAjM-1QIVTySBCh1YlwgsEAAAYASAAEgKNfPD_BwE) and the Texas Department of State Health Services page <http://www.texaszika.org/>.

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