The Buzz on Zika – Protecting Workers Against the Zika Virus



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

The Zika virus has recently emerged as a disease of significant public health concern. Currently, a large outbreak is occurring in South America and moving up into North America. The virus has the potential to spread anywhere that mosquitoes capable of spreading the virus are found.

What's the Danger?

Zika infection can cause birth defects, including abnormal brain development, and post-infectious neurological complications. The mosquitoes that carry the virus can also carry other viruses, including yellow fever and West Nile.

Approximately one in five infected people will develop symptoms of the Zika virus. Symptoms usually start two to seven days after a bite from an infected mosquito and are usually mild. The most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain and red or pink eyes. Other symptoms include muscle pain and headache.

How to Protect Yourself

During the first week of infection, the virus can be detected in the blood and can spread from an infected person to a mosquito that feeds on that person. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites. In some instances, having direct contact with infectious blood or other body fluids of an infected person, including through sexual contact, can result in the spread of the virus.

Follow these steps to lessen the chance of mosquito bites at work, at home and when travelling.

- Wear light-colored, long-sleeved tucked-in shirts, long pants, shoes or boots and a hat.
- Use insect repellents:

– It is recommended that adults use repellents that contain 20-30 percent DEET

or 20 percent icaridin.

– Apply a permethrin insecticide to clothing and other travel gear for greater protection:

> Permethrin-treated clothing is effective through several washes.

> Always follow label instructions when using permethrin.

> Never use permethrin directly on skin.

> Although permethrin clothing treatments are not widely available in Canada, travel health clinics can advise you how to purchase permethrin and pre-treated gear before or during your trip.

– Insect repellents, insecticide treated bed nets and permethrin treated clothing/clothing treatments have been reviewed for safety in Canada and the United States. They are considered safe for children and adults, including pregnant and breastfeeding women if used according to label directions.

- Take steps to control mosquitoes at work and at home.

– Get rid of standing water and tightly cover water storage containers so mosquitoes cannot get inside to lay eggs.

> For containers without lids, use wire mesh with holes smaller than an adult mosquito.

> Use larvicides to treat large containers of water that will not be used for drinking and cannot be covered or dumped out.

– Use an outdoor insect spray where mosquitoes rest.

> Mosquitoes like to rest in dark, humid areas such as under equipment, or under a garage or storage area.

> When using insecticides, always follow label instructions.

– Fix window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. Use a mosquito net over beds to protect you from mosquito bites while you sleep.

- Talk to your supervisor about doing outdoor work if you are or may become pregnant, or for males, if your partner is or may become pregnant.
- Discuss any possible exposure to mosquitoes or infections spread by mosquitoes with a healthcare provider.

– If symptoms develop, seek medical attention promptly.

– While there is no vaccine for Zika, treatment includes getting plenty of rest and water and taking medicine as directed by your doctor for pain and fever.

Final Word

While the threat of Zika is cause for concern, with the proper precautions you can keep yourself and others safe.