



HEALTH INFORMATION

Zika virus

The Zika virus infection situation is changing daily and the latest advice should be checked with Public Health England, who have put together advice in conjunction with the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners under the title of “Zika virus infection: guidance for primary care”.

Description

Zika virus (ZIKV) infection was first identified in a monkey in the Ugandan Zika forest in 1947. This viral infection can now be found in a number of countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands. The first case of locally acquired ZIKV in the Americas was reported from Easter Island during 2014. Brazil confirmed the first locally acquired cases of ZIKV in 2015. Multiple countries are currently experiencing outbreaks, particularly in South and Central America, and the Caribbean.

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is not present in the UK, so cases will be associated with transmission by mosquito bites in those countries with the Zika Virus transmission.

Incubation period

It is estimated that the disease may present up to 14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito.

Symptoms

The majority of people infected with ZIKA virus have no symptoms, or have sub-clinical illness but one in four people do develop the following symptoms, which are similar to those of Dengue and Chikungunya:

- mild fever
- rash
- headache
- itching

- conjunctivitis/red eyes
- eye pain
- muscle pain
- joint pain (with possible swelling mainly in the smaller joints of the hands and feet)

It is usually a mild, short-lived and self-limiting disease, and may last from 4-7 days. Severe cases are uncommon.

There is no proven link as yet but there has been an increase in microcephaly (abnormal small head size with poor brain development) in new-born babies in some countries with endemic Zika virus. This is possibly related to ZIKV and further investigations are ongoing. In addition a number of countries have reported an increase in a neurological condition called Guillain-Barre syndrome, which is being investigated as it may be linked with ZIKV.

How is the ZIKA virus infection transmitted?

ZIKV is transmitted by the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito – all travellers are at risk of being bitten. *Aedes* mosquitoes bite during the day, between dawn and dusk (as opposed to those which transmit malaria, which bite at night from dusk to dawn). This is the same mosquito which transmits dengue fever and chikungunya, both of which cause similar symptoms. The virus has been detected in semen and possible cases of sexual transmission have been reported.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually made on clinical symptoms and history of travel. Blood tests can help to confirm the diagnosis. Zika virus can be detected during a 7 day period following onset of typical symptoms.