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Agency News

Zika virus hazards, prevention

Warm summer temperatures and wet weather conditions have combined to create an active mosquito season this year, increasing the chances of being infected with a mosquito-borne illness like the Zika virus.

The Zika virus is most often spread by the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito, which bite during both day and nighttime hours and are responsible for transmitting many viruses, including Zika. The virus can also be transmitted by sexual intercourse and possibly blood transfusion, though this route of infection has not been confirmed.

Zika can be transmitted from an infected pregnant woman to her fetus, possibly causing a serious birth defect. Other problems have been detected among infants infected with the Zika virus before birth, including eye defects, hearing deficits and impaired growth. There have also been increased reports of Guillain-Barre syndrome, an uncommon disorder of the nervous system.

Symptoms of Zika infection vary from case to case. Many people infected with Zika experience only mild symptoms, and some might not show any symptoms at all. The most

common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes. Muscle pain and headache might also occur, though to a lesser degree. These symptoms can last from a few days to a week, and those infected with the virus usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital. People infected with Zika are likely to develop immunity to future infections and deaths from Zika are very rare.

Diagnosis of Zika is based on recent travel history, symptoms and medical test results. A blood or urine test is necessary to confirm a Zika infection, because symptoms of Zika are similar to other illnesses spread through mosquito bites, like dengue fever and chikungunya. Your doctor or healthcare provider can order tests to check for several types of mosquito-borne infections.

Currently, there is no specific medicine or vaccine to treat a Zika infection. The best way to deal with the virus is to treat the symptoms by getting plenty of rest, drinking fluids to prevent dehydration, and taking a medication such as acetaminophen to

reduce fever and pain. Do not take aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). If you are taking medicine for another medical condition, talk to your healthcare provider before taking additional medication.

TDCJ's health service providers, the University of Texas Medical Branch and Texas Tech Health Science Center, coordinate with the agency's Health Services Division to help prevent and treat Zika infections, in compliance with agency's health service policies. To maintain situational awareness of the Zika threat, information updates are emailed to the agency's executive staff, with additional updates provided as needed.

TDCJ units issue insect repellent to offenders who typically work outside; this includes agricultural, kennel, yard squad, landscaping and other jobs. Insect-repellent towelettes are also available through unit commissaries. Unit staff work to prevent any accumulation of standing water where mosquitos might breed, and replace damaged window screens where flying insects might enter. Units also participate in a comprehensive pest control program designed to control a wide variety of pests and administered by the agency's



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Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Division.

The best way to prevent being infected by mosquito-borne disease is to protect yourself from being bitten. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and treat your clothing with an insect repellent like permethrin, or buy clothing that has been pretreated.

Use an insect repellent which includes one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus,

para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone. When used as directed, these repellents have been proven safe and effective even for



pregnant and breast-feeding women. Do not use insect repellents on babies younger than two months old, or products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus or para-menthane-diol on children younger than three years old. At home, use window and door screens to keep

mosquitoes out, and use mosquito netting to protect babies younger than two months old in carriers, strollers or cribs.

To learn more about the Zika virus, visit the Zika information page at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. ●