

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

Zika virus infection

Derek R. MacFadden MD, Isaac I. Bogoch MD

CMAJ Podcasts: author interview at <https://soundcloud.com/cmajpodcasts/151486-five>**Zika virus is transmitted through mosquito bites and typically causes asymptomatic infection or mild symptoms in most people**

The symptoms of Zika virus infection may last up to one week and include a maculopapular rash, fever, joint and muscle pain, and conjunctivitis.^{1,2} Previous outbreaks in the Pacific Islands and the current outbreak have indicated a potential association with neurologic illnesses such as Guillain-Barré syndrome.^{1,2}

People travelling to affected areas should protect themselves from mosquito bites

People planning to travel to Central and South America, the Caribbean and Mexico can stay up to date on the changing geographic distribution of the Zika virus through online resources.⁴ Infection can be prevented by wearing protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants and by using insect repellents containing DEET (diethyltoluamide) or icaridin, also known as picaridin.^{4,5}

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Zika virus has spread rapidly via bites from infected *Aedes* mosquitoes

Since its identification in Brazil in May 2015, Zika virus has spread through many countries in South and Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico.³ *Aedes* mosquitoes, found globally in tropical and subtropical regions, bite during the day and are particularly active during dawn and dusk (Figure 1). These mosquitoes also transmit dengue and chikungunya viruses. These infections, along with malaria, should be considered in febrile travellers returning from affected regions.



Figure 1: *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes transmit Zika virus.

Treatment of Zika virus infection is supportive

The diagnosis of Zika virus infection is based on results of serum polymerase chain reaction or serologic testing.^{4,5} Acetaminophen can be used to relieve the fever and pain associated with infection.^{4,5}

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A potential link between Zika virus infection in pregnant women and congenital microcephaly in newborns is under investigation

Although the potential association between Zika virus infection and microcephaly is being investigated, the Public Health Agency of Canada has cautioned pregnant women and women considering becoming pregnant to assess their risk and consider postponing travel to affected areas and to use individual protection measures to prevent mosquito bites should they choose to travel.⁵

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Affiliations: Division of Infectious Diseases (MacFadden, Bogoch), University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.; Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (MacFadden), Harvard University, Boston, Mass.

Correspondence to: Derek MacFadden, derek.macfadden@mail.utoronto.ca

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