

# **Zika outbreak: Awareness**

**The World Health Organization has declared the Zika virus a global public health emergency.**

The infection is suspected of leading to thousands of babies being born with underdeveloped brains.

Some areas have declared a state of emergency, doctors have described it as "a pandemic in progress" and some are even advising women in affected countries to delay getting pregnant.

But there is much we do not know in this emerging infection.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Deaths are rare and only one-in-five people infected is thought to develop symptoms.

These include:

- mild fever
- conjunctivitis (red, sore eyes)
- headache
- joint pain
- a rash

A rare nervous system disorder, Guillain-Barre syndrome, that can cause temporary paralysis has been linked to the infection.

There is no vaccine or drug treatment so patients are advised to rest and drink plenty of fluids.

But the biggest concern is the impact it could have on babies developing in the womb and the surge in microcephaly.

## How does it spread?

It is spread by *Aedes* mosquitoes.

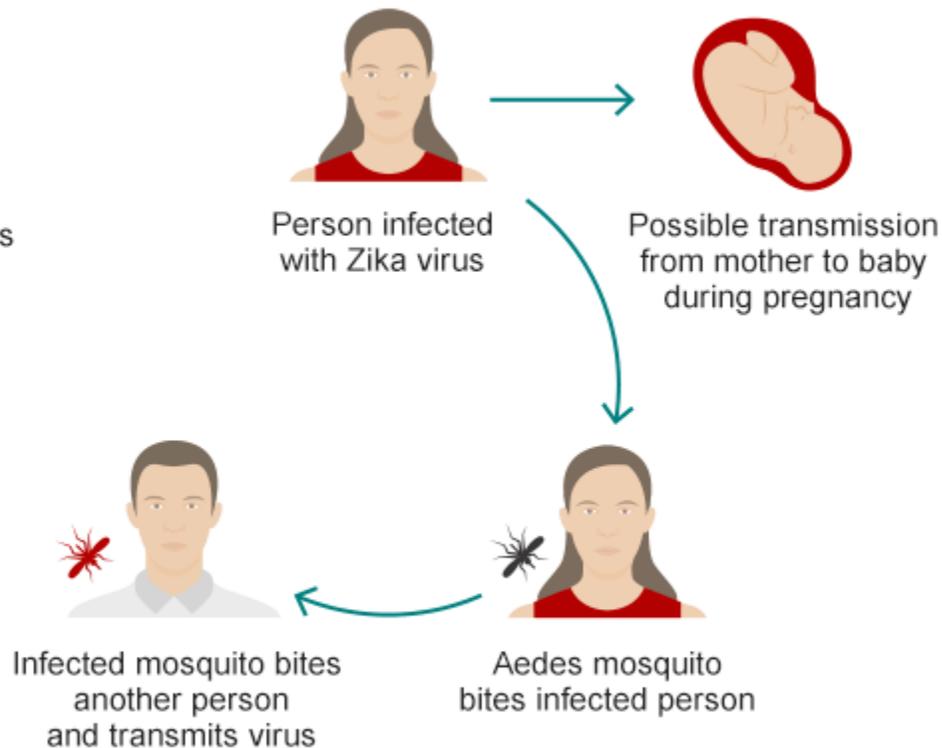
If they drink the blood of an infected person they can then infect subsequent people they bite.

It is unclear for how long someone can transmit the virus after being infected.

## Zika virus transmission cycle

### Symptoms

- Fever
- Rash
- Joint pain
- Conjunctivitis (red eyes)



Zika can be transmitted through blood, but this is an infrequent mechanism. The virus has also been isolated in semen, but person-to-person sexual transmission is unconfirmed.

Source: PAHO/WHO

BBC

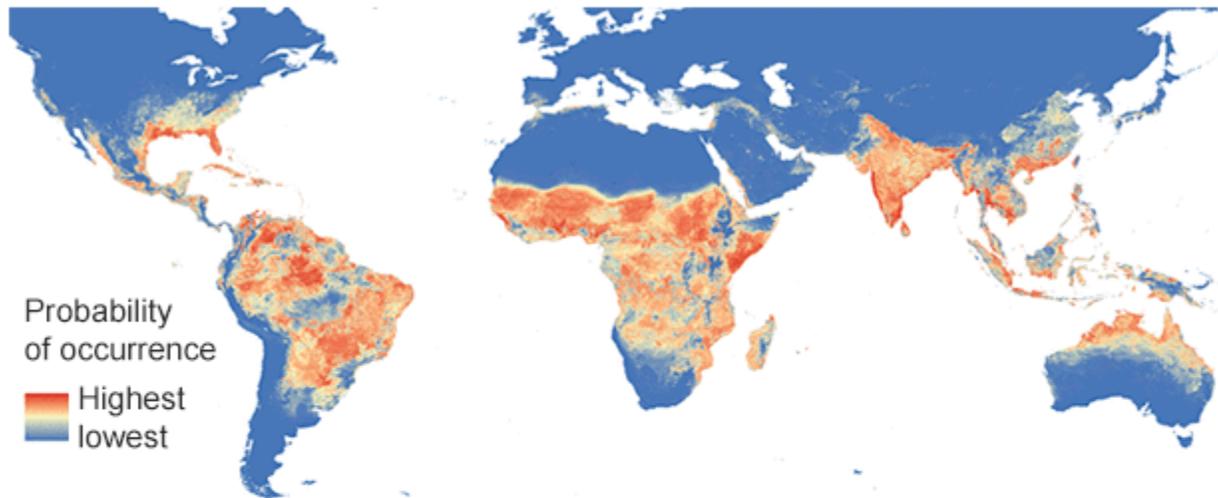
They are the same insects that spread dengue and chikungunya virus.

And, unlike the mosquitoes that spread malaria, they are mostly active during the day, so bed nets offer limited protection. Scientists have warned that countries in Asia could face large outbreaks too.

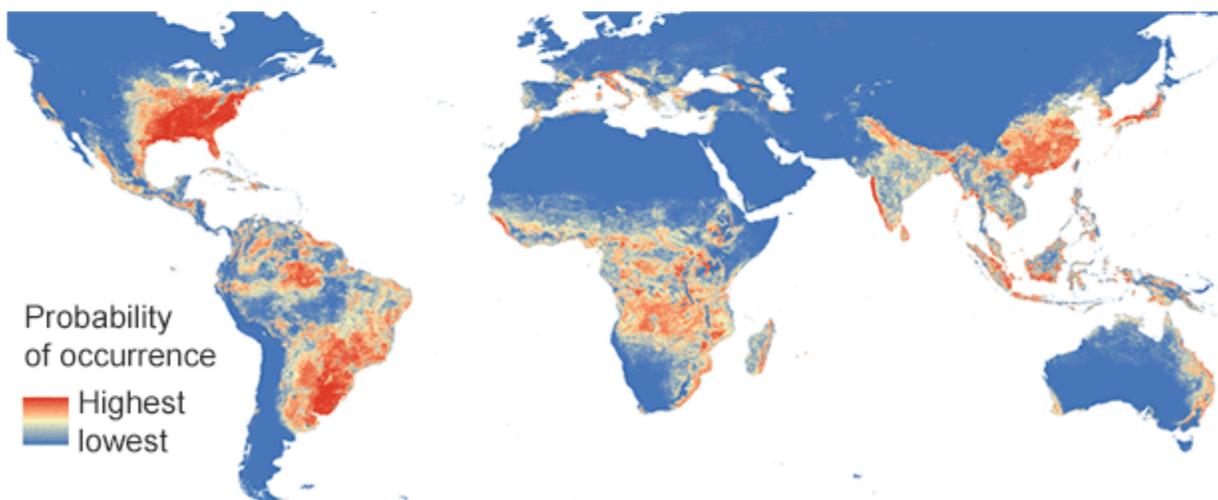
### Global distribution of *Aedes* mosquitoes

*Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* can spread the Zika virus if infected with it

#### *Aedes aegypti* mosquito



#### *Aedes albopictus* mosquito



Predicted global distribution of each species based on statistical distribution models

Source: ELife 2015

## How long are people infectious?

The best evidence so far suggests that people can spread the virus via mosquitoes for a week after being infected.

In semen it may persist for two weeks.

Countries have advised safe sex and a ban on blood donations for a month after just visiting such countries and for longer if they developed symptoms.

## What can people do?

As there is no treatment, the only option is to reduce the risk of being bitten.

Health officials advise people to:

- use insect repellents
- cover up with long-sleeved clothes
- keep windows and doors closed

The mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water, so people are also being told to empty buckets and flower pots.

The US Centers for Disease Control has advised pregnant women **not to travel** to affected areas.