

The facts about Zika virus in New Mexico

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 07 October 2016 05:59



New Mexico has had seven reported cases of Zika virus. Of those, all seven were in travelers who were infected abroad and diagnosed after they returned home.

The two mosquito species in the United States that can transmit Zika virus have been found in some parts of southern New Mexico. If a person gets infected with the virus while in an area with Zika virus transmission and then goes to a part of New Mexico where *Aedes aegypti* or *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes are present, those mosquitoes could become infected with the virus by biting the infected person and could then spread the infection to other people they bite.

To prevent this from happening, the New Mexico Department of Health recommends that anyone who has traveled to a Zika-affected area in the previous two weeks protect themselves against mosquito bites by following the precautions listed at cdc.gov and nmhealth.org.

Case counts by county

Bernalillo - 4

Chaves - 1

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Doña Ana – 1 (this person was not in Doña Ana County during the part of his illness when he could infect any mosquitoes or people)

Santa Fe – 1

Mosquitos capable of transmitting Zika were found in Sierra County as recently as August.

Some background on the virus

Zika is the virus that causes the Zika infection. The virus is mainly spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Only certain kinds of mosquitoes are able to transmit the virus that can cause disease.

About four out of five people infected with Zika virus will have no signs or symptoms of illness.

The people who do become ill may have fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Symptoms are usually mild and last from a few days to a week. It is rare for a person with Zika virus infection to become severely ill or be hospitalized.

Although more investigation is needed, there is evidence that Zika virus infection causes birth defects or miscarriage in some pregnant women who are exposed early in their pregnancies.

There have also been reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome following Zika virus infection. Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare but serious disorder that affects nerves and can cause a number of complications including paralysis, respiratory distress, and rarely death.

Transmission

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Mosquitos are infected by feeding on a person who has the virus. There are only two kinds of mosquito in the U.S. that are able to transmit Zika: *Aedes aegypti* (the yellow fever mosquito) and *Aedes albopictus* (the Asian tiger mosquito). These mosquitoes are also capable of transmitting other diseases to people, such as dengue and chikungunya viruses.

These two species of mosquitoes like to live near people, either indoors or outdoors, and mostly bite during the daytime. They can sometimes be distinguished by their bold black-and-white markings, which are different from the gray or brown color of most other kinds of mosquitoes.

If you have seen black and white mosquitoes that bite during the day in New Mexico, take a clear photograph and email it as an attachment to doh-zoonoses@state.nm.us address. Please be sure to include when and where you saw the mosquito.

The virus can also be transmitted from a mother to her fetus during pregnancy or to her baby at the time of delivery; these risks are currently being studied. There have been no reports of infants becoming infected with Zika virus through breastfeeding.

Zika virus can be spread through blood transfusions, too. Because of this, American blood banks are not accepting donations from people who have traveled to a Zika-affected area until an appropriate number of days after they have returned to an area where Zika virus is not present.

There is also a risk of Zika virus transmission through sexual contact.

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