

Important Information Regarding The Zika Virus

The Zika virus is a disease that is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week after being bitten by an infected mosquito. People usually don't get sick enough to go to the doctor. For this reason, many people might not realize they have been infected. Because the symptoms of Zika are similar to those of many other diseases, many cases may not have been recognized. Studies have shown that 80% of people infected with Zika never have any symptoms that they have been infected with the virus. It has also been discovered that men infected with the Zika virus can pass the virus to their sexually intimate partners. The Zika virus remains in the blood of an infected individual for approximately 1 week after exposure but research has shown that it can remain in semen for 6 to 8 weeks or possibly longer.

In May 2015, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued an alert regarding the first confirmed Zika virus infection in Brazil and on Feb 1, 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Zika virus a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). Local transmission has been reported in many other countries and territories. Zika virus likely will continue to spread to new areas quickly. It is predicted to reach the southern US this spring or summer. The reason it is spreading so quickly is that most people have never been exposed to the Zika virus in the past so they have no antibodies to Zika. Once exposed to the Zika virus the likelihood of contracting Zika again in the future is highly unlikely. On February 5, 2016 the CDC issued an updated guideline for health care providers and women of reproductive age with possible Zika virus exposure. It is very important to counsel your reproductive female patients and pregnant patients regarding the risk of contracting the Zika virus during pregnancy or at the time they are attempting to conceive.

The Zika virus can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn child and has been linked to serious birth defects. One is a defect of the brain called microcephaly in babies of mothers who had Zika virus while pregnant. CDC recommends special precautions for pregnant women. Pregnant women and women trying to conceive should consider delaying travel to areas with Zika. It is very important that pregnant women and women that are trying to get pregnant be counselled about the risks of travelling to areas with transmittable Zika virus. They also need to use precautions such as condoms or abstinence if they are having sexual relations with a man that has travelled to a Zika transmittable area or if he has been diagnosed with the Zika Virus.

What is microcephaly? Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is much smaller than expected. During pregnancy, a baby's head grows because the baby's brain grows. Microcephaly can occur because a baby's brain has not developed properly during pregnancy or has stopped growing after birth, which results in a smaller head size. Microcephaly can be an isolated condition, meaning that it can occur with no other major birth defects, or it can occur in combination with other major birth defects.

In late January International Cryogenics reviewed all donor charts going back to January of 2015 (well before the Zika outbreak) thru to the current date to see if any of our donors had travelled to areas where the CDC has reported Zika Virus transmission through mosquito bites. Donors complete medical and travel update questionnaires repeatedly during the time they are donors at our facility. We found that none of our donors had travelled to any of the locations listed on the CDC website as Zika transmission areas during the time they were donating. We have also implemented the new guidelines the FDA issued in early March 2016. The guideline states that any donor that has travelled to a known Zika transmission area, or has been diagnosed with Zika, had sexual relations with a man that has been diagnosed with Zika or sexual relations with a man that has travelled to a known Zika area, may not be deemed eligible for transplantation for a period of 6 months after the possible exposure. This guideline applies to all anonymous and directed tissue donors. In addition to our sperm donors we have all sperm banking clientele complete a Zika virus risk evaluation questionnaire and provide them with an informational sheet on the Zika Virus and how to avoid exposure. All reproductive age patients male and female should be counselled of how the Zika virus is transmitted and how to avoid possible exposure for the protection of their unborn children.