

Zika Virus Infection (ZVI)

Cause of Infection

Mosquito-borne disease caused by Zika virus

Mode of transmission

- ZVI is transmitted to human being through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito
- ZVI can be transmitted from pregnant mother to baby and causes microcephaly, neurological and autoimmune complications (e.g. Guillain-Barré syndrome) to baby
- ZVI has also been found in human semen and transmission by sexual contact has been confirmed
- Blood transfusion and perinatal transmission are possible

Signs and symptoms

- Most are asymptomatic
- Include skin rash, fever, conjunctivitis, muscle or joint pain and general malaise
- Symptoms can last for 2-17 days but are mild

Incubation period

- 2-7 days after the bite of an infected mosquito

Investigation

Zika virus can be tested in laboratory. It is reported that the virus appears in human serum until the 7th day of onset. And it can stay in urine until the 14th day after the onset of symptoms. Therefore, it is preferred that suspected patient's urine is collected for investigation once symptoms appear.

Please be aware of the possibility of Zika virus infection for travellers returning from affected areas and present with clinically compatible picture.

Laboratory testing for Zika virus infection is available at the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB) of Centre for Health Protection (CHP).

Although Zika infection is not a notifiable disease in Hong Kong, we will arrange early isolation and inform CHP for further investigation if we encounter patients with suspected Zika virus infection.

Visit Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for areas with active Zika virus transmission (<https://www.cdc.gov/zika>)

Additional Information

At present, there is no effective vaccine against Zika virus infection. To prevent Zika virus infection, members of the public are reminded to protect themselves from mosquito bites and help prevent mosquito proliferation.

General measures on preventing mosquito-borne diseases

1. Wear loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers, and use DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed parts of the body and clothing.
2. Take additional preventive measures when engaging in outdoor activities:
 - Avoid using fragrant cosmetics or skin care products
 - Re-apply insect repellents according to instructions

Special notes when travelling abroad

- If going to affected areas, travellers, especially persons with immune disorders or severe chronic illnesses, should arrange a consultation with doctor at least 6 weeks before the trip, and have extra preventive measures to avoid mosquito bites.
- If travelling in rural affected areas, carry a portable bed net and apply permethrin (an insecticide) on it.
- Travellers returning from affected areas should apply insect repellent for 14 days after arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, for example, having fever, should seek medical advice promptly, and provide travel details to doctor.
- Travellers should consider not having sex during travel to affected areas, and consider abstinence from sex for at least 2 months upon return, or else condoms should be used. If male travellers returning from affected areas were diagnosed with Zika virus infection or have compatible symptoms, they should consider abstinence from sex for at least 6 months upon onset, or else condoms should be used.

Special notes for women preparing for pregnancy

Pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy should not travel to affected areas. Those who must travel to any of these areas should seek medical advice from their doctor before the trip, adopt contraception if appropriate, strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip, and consult and reveal their travel history to their doctor if symptoms develop after the trip. Women preparing for pregnancy are advised to continue to adopt contraception for at least 2 months after returning from these areas if they have no symptoms of Zika virus infection, or 6 months if one or both members of the couple are symptomatic.

Special notes for prevention of sexual transmission regarding adverse pregnancy outcome

- Pregnant lady should not have sex with her male partner who had travelled to affected areas, or else condom should be used for at least 6 months.
- Any male traveller returning from affected areas should abstain from sex with his pregnant partner, or else use condoms throughout the pregnancy.
- Use condom for at least 6 months if his female partner may get pregnant.

Special notes on preventing local mosquito proliferation

1. Prevent accumulation of stagnant water
 - Change the water in vases once a week
 - Clear the water in the saucers under potted plants every week
 - Cover water containers tightly
 - Ensure air-conditioner drip trays are free of stagnant water
 - Put all used cans and bottles into covered dustbins
2. Control vectors and reservoir of the diseases
 - Store food and dispose of garbage properly

Reference:

DC. Countries with Endemic Zika.
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information>
CHP. Zika Virus Infection.
<http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/24/43088.html>
WHO. Zika Virus.
<http://who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/zika/en/>

The materials contained here are for general health information only, and are not intended to replace the advice of a doctor. Matilda International Hospital and Matilda Medical Centre will not be liable for any decisions the reader makes based on this material.

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