Zika Virus: Pediatrician Advice for Families

This handout provides some basic information about the risks of Zika virus infection during pregnancy and some things you can do if you are worried that your infant or unborn child may be infected. The video “Pediatrician Advice for Families: Responding to Your Concerns about Zika” can be seen at www.healthychildren.org/zikavirus and has additional information.

What we know about Zika virus infection

Women who are pregnant or considering becoming pregnant should avoid areas where Zika virus is known to be a risk. If you live in these areas, you may consider waiting to become pregnant. If you are already pregnant, take the following steps to avoid getting mosquito bites:

- Regularly use bug spray that is safe for pregnant women
- Cover your arms and legs with clothing when outdoors
- Stay indoors when you can

Zika virus can also be spread by sexual contact for several months. Men should wait at least 6 months before trying to conceive a baby, and women should wait at least 8 weeks.

Zika virus cannot be spread by coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing a glass. People who are infected don’t have to avoid being near others, even pregnant women. Almost all adults who become infected will recover without treatment. The main concern is when Zika infection occurs during pregnancy.

Possible effects of Zika virus infection on babies

At birth, most babies with Zika virus will be okay. But in some babies, being born with Zika virus can slow the growth and development of their brain. Some of these babies are born with abnormally small heads or have problems with their development, joints, vision, or hearing, and they may have seizures. Some babies who are infected may appear normal at birth, but issues could arise during their first year. Experts don’t know yet if there are other problems that may not be seen until later in childhood.

Your pediatrician can help you determine possible concerns and refer you to specialists.
Concerns about Zika virus infection can cause strong emotions

Finding out that your unborn child may be infected with Zika virus can cause a range of strong feelings, including the following:

- Feeling afraid, anxious and worried, sad or depressed, or a sense of loss
- Finding it hard to concentrate and make decisions
- Experiencing sleep or appetite problems or feeling tired or drained
- Having physical complaints, such as headaches or stomachaches
- Having a shorter temper than usual

You may be asked to make difficult decisions quickly, at a time when you are upset. Remember that your concerns are important.

**SHARE YOUR CONCERNS WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM**

**Strategies to deal with stress**

Some common things you can do to deal with stress include the following:

- Talk with a counselor and someone you trust, such as family, friends, or a faith-based professional
- Join a support group or talk with others with similar experiences through social media
- Write about your feelings, practice art or other creative activities
- Try exercise, yoga, or meditation

Be sure not to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to relax—these are never good ways to avoid distress, and they can be very harmful to a fetus.

Ask for and accept help from professionals who can teach you new ways to deal with your stress. Your partner, family members, and friends may have different ways they deal with stress. Figure out what works best for you—and those you care about.

This information is accurate as of April 2017. For the most up-to-date information, see the resources below.

**Resources**

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists resource page for patients: [http://www.acog.org/About-ACOG/ACOG-Departments/Zika-Virus/Resources-for-Patients](http://www.acog.org/About-ACOG/ACOG-Departments/Zika-Virus/Resources-for-Patients)
- American Academy of Pediatrics Zika resource page for families: [www.healthychildren.org/zikavirus](http://www.healthychildren.org/zikavirus)

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The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend, based on individual facts and circumstances.

For more information, contact the American Academy of Pediatrics at DisasterReady@aap.org. The AAP acknowledges David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP, for his leadership on this product.

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