

Zika now in Florida—what you need to know

August 3 2016



Credit: Florida International University

Fourteen people in Miami-Dade and Broward counties have been infected with the Zika virus by local mosquitoes, health officials announced today.

Although 1,650 Zika infections have been reported in the United States,

this is the first time patients are not linked to travel outside the U.S. mainland. Florida Gov. Rick Scott says officials believe the infections occurred in a small area just north of downtown Miami.

At the beginning of the year, FIU convened a panel discussion with university experts in public health, medicine and science to address the disease and its implications for South Florida.

Here are 5 takeaways you need to know:

(1) Transmission

Zika is transmitted through the bite of a daytime-active species of mosquito called *Aedes aegypti*, which is prevalent in warm, humid climates, such as South Florida.

(2) Cause for concern during pregnancy

The WHO suspects a link between Zika infection during pregnancy and microcephaly in the babies of those infected at birth; the condition results in infants born with abnormally small heads and underdeveloped brains.

The cause for concern arose after thousands of cases of microcephaly were reported in Brazil in the last year, an increase of 3,900 percent from the number of cases reported in 2014.

There is little definitive information indicating how long the virus persists in the body once contracted, so infectious diseases professor Dr. Aileen Marty suggests waiting two months after recovery from Zika virus infection before trying to become pregnant.

(3) No known treatment

"There is no specific treatment for Zika," Marty said. "It's still up in the air as to whether any of the existing antivirals would have any effect whatsoever, and whether they would do more harm than good."

Additionally, no vaccine has yet been developed to prevent the contraction of Zika.

(4) Symptoms

Zika's symptoms can include rash, joint pains, conjunctivitis (pinkeye) and fever, and tend to subside within a week or two. And in approximately 75 percent of cases, people show no symptoms at all.

Though no treatment for the Zika virus itself exists, its symptoms can be treated by drinking plenty of fluids, resting and taking acetaminophen to reduce pain and fevers.

Health promotion and disease prevention professor Dr. Consuelo Beck-Sagué warned against taking NSAID pain relievers like aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen, however, unless doctors have ruled out the possibility of having hemorrhagic dengue fever, a disease that is similar to Zika.

"Acetaminophen is your friend," she said.

(5) Prevention

FIU professors suggest the best ways to prevent contracting Zika are to wear long clothing; use DEET, or other mosquito repellents; and to check surroundings to ensure there is no standing water, where

mosquitoes can breed.

Alternative repellants like oil of lemon eucalyptus might also work. Keep in mind the U.S. Food and Drug Administration counsels that insect repellents containing DEET should not be used in infants under 2 months of age. Oil of lemon eucalyptus products should not be used on children under 3 years of age.

Provided by Florida International University

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