

Epilepsy: Another potential Zika threat to babies

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(HealthDay)—Beyond its known links to birth defects and other

problems, the Zika virus may also trigger cases of epilepsy in infants, warn experts from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Among 48 babies from Brazil with probable congenital Zika infection, "50 percent reportedly had clinical seizures," said Dr. Daniel Pastula, Dr. Marshalyn Yeargin-Allsopp and Rosemarie Kobau.

All three have studied Zika at the CDC, and co-wrote an essay on the Zika-epilepsy connection, published online April 17 in *JAMA Neurology*.

The Zika virus is transmitted via mosquito bites, and its most devastating effects occur when pregnant women are infected. In those cases, Zika can trigger severe neurological [birth defects](#) such as microcephaly, where infants are born with underdeveloped skulls and brains.

Thousands of such cases have occurred in South America, most notably in Brazil.

And other pediatric defects and illnesses linked to Zika are emerging.

According to the CDC team, besides the group of 48 babies cited above, seven of another group of 13 Zika-exposed babies in Brazil were also diagnosed as having epilepsy.

The finding isn't overly surprising since the types of [brain abnormalities](#) seen in Zika-affected newborns have been linked to seizures and epilepsy in the past, the team noted.

In a prior study, babies exposed to another common virus, called cytomegalovirus, had higher rates of epilepsy as well—and showed brain abnormalities that were similar to those associated with Zika.

All of this points to "the need to examine how and to what extent congenital Zika virus infection and resulting brain abnormalities are

associated with seizures and/or epilepsy," the CDC authors wrote.

Early diagnosis of affected babies is crucial, the researchers added, and may lessen "some adverse outcomes associated with developmental delay."

Right now, parents and [health care professionals](#) may not be aware of the Zika-epilepsy link, the CDC researchers said, so cases "may be misdiagnosed or under-reported."

The researchers believe that heightened awareness will be key to spotting cases of epilepsy linked to fetal exposure to Zika and helping [babies](#).

In a statement, the CDC said that "better recognition, diagnosis, and reporting of seizures and [epilepsy](#) in infants and young children will help guide interventions to make sure families receive the right support and treatment."

More information: April 17, 2017, *JAMA Neurology*, online; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, news release, April 17, 2017

For more on Zika, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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