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Occupational Health General Information Leaflet

Zika Virus

What is the Zika virus?

There is currently an outbreak of Zika virus affecting South and Central America. The Zika virus is an infection carried by the Aedes species of mosquito. It is only known to be transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected female Aedes mosquito. The Aedes mosquito and the Zika virus are not naturally present in the UK.

What are the symptoms?

Zika infections are usually mild, short-lived and self-limiting. Most people infected with Zika virus have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually last around 2-7 days. Commonly reported symptoms include low-grade fever, joint pain, rashes, headache and red or sore eyes.

What are the risks?

Zika virus does not naturally occur in the UK. Even if a person acquires Zika abroad and becomes ill on their return to the UK, the risk to the wider population is negligible. Zika infections are only thought to pose a problem in pregnancy. Recent increases in babies born with abnormally small heads (microcephaly) in Zika outbreak areas may be due to the Zika virus. For this reason, Public Health England advises the following:

- Female travellers who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant should avoid travelling to an area where Zika transmission is being reported.
- Male travellers returning from an area where Zika transmission is being reported and have a female partner at risk of getting pregnant; or who is already pregnant should use condoms for 28 days after returning. If Zika symptoms occur or Zika infection is confirmed by a doctor, then condom use is advised for 6 months

Anybody with symptoms returning from areas where Zika transmission is being reported should see their GP for further advice.

Up to date travel advice for countries reporting Zika transmission is available from the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) (<http://travelhealthpro.org.uk>).

For general information about Zika virus see NHS Choices (<http://www.nhs.uk/news/2016/01January/Pages/Zika-virus-your-questions-answered.aspx>)

Person accountable for the document

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