

Zika Virus Update
Susan Karras, RN, BSN, MBA
McHenry County Department of Health

The McHenry County Department of Health along with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is closely monitoring cases of Zika virus in the United States and around the world.

At this time, residents of McHenry County and northern Illinois are at a very low risk for Zika virus. The Zika virus is primarily transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which is rare to absent in most of Illinois. *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos may be found on occasion in Illinois, because they can be transported on used tires from a warmer climate. However, the *Aedes aegypti* cannot survive freezing temperatures and is not be expected to become an established mosquito population in Illinois.

Research is ongoing to determine if other species of mosquitoes, including those that may be commonly found in Illinois, are likely to become significant vectors of the Zika virus. *Aedes aegypti*, like *Culex pipiens*, the Illinois vector of West Nile Virus, are container breeding mosquitoes. Therefore, water filled containers can produce several mosquito species that can carry human disease. Simple precautions should be taken around your home to reduce the number of mosquitoes and prevent mosquito bites. Use insect repellent when mosquitoes are biting, and remove or regularly empty artificial containers. Throughout the summer months, the Division of Environmental Health investigates complaints of mosquito breeding sites caused by accumulations of rubbish, improperly maintained swimming pools and malfunctioning private sewage disposal systems.

Before 2015, Zika outbreaks occurred in areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. In May of 2015, the Pan American Health Organization confirmed the first Zika virus infection occurring in Brazil. Transmission of the Zika virus continues in the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, Pacific Islands and recently in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Zika cases have been reported in the continental United States. All were travelers returning from transmission countries.

Because there is currently not a vaccine or medication to prevent or treat the Zika virus, the CDC has issued travel advisories cautioning women who are (or could become) pregnant to avoid traveling to active virus transmission areas. Up to date travel information regarding areas of active Zika transmission can be found at the CDC travel website <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/zika-travel-information>).

Zika virus symptoms include fever, rash, joint and muscle pain, red eyes, and headache. These symptoms are typically mild and resolve without seeking medical attention. Although a direct link has not been confirmed, many studies demonstrate that pregnant women infected with the Zika virus can pass the infection to their fetuses which could result in babies born with microcephaly (small head) and/or other neurological abnormalities.

People traveling to areas of active virus transmission should take steps to prevent infection. Recommendations include prevention of mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and applying insect repellent as directed.

Information about Zika virus is changing rapidly. The CDC, IDPH and the health department, are working closely to make sure healthcare providers have access to updated recommendations and testing. If you

had recent travel (within two weeks) to an area of transmission risk and have developed symptoms of Zika virus, see your healthcare provider and inform them of your travel dates and locations. If you are pregnant and have traveled to an area of transmission risk, whether you are having symptoms or not, call the McHenry County Department of Health at 815-334-4500 or your healthcare provider. For current information visit www.mcdh.info or www.cdc.gov.