

Zika Prevention in Children

Everywhere you turn these days, the spread of the Zika virus is talked about in the media. Recently it has even been identified in Texas, primarily in the Rio Grande Valley region. With it encroaching so close to home, we thought it wise to review how it spreads, what the symptoms are and what can be done to prevent it.

As most of you probably know, Zika is contracted when humans are infected by mosquitos. Humans can then spread it from person to person through blood transfusion, mother to baby in utero and sexual contact.

Symptoms associated with a Zika viral infection are relatively mild and in fact many experience no symptoms at all. For those that do show signs, the illness may entail a fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes which lasts approximately 3-7 days. The scare associated with Zika stems around an increase of newborn microcephaly believed to be associated with a Zika virus outbreak in Brazil starting in 2015.

To prevent the contraction of Zika virus, the CDC recommendations taking steps to prevent mosquito bites by following these recommendations:

- Wear protective clothing including long sleeve shirts, pants, socks and hats to create a physical barrier from mosquitoes.
- Use mosquito repelling clothing treated with permethrin which lasts for 6 washes.
- Avoid being outside during sunrise and sunset when the insects are most active.
- The current AAP and CDC recommendation for children older than 2 months of age is to use 10% to 30% DEET. DEET should not be used on children younger than 2 months of age.
- The effectiveness is similar for 10% DEET and 30% DEET but the duration of effect varies. Ten percent DEET provides protection for about 2 hours, and 30% protects for about 5 hours. Choose the lowest concentration that will provide the required length of coverage.
- The concentration of DEET varies significantly from product to product, so read the label of any product you purchase.
- As an alternative to DEET, Picaridin has become available in the U.S. in concentrations of 7% to 20%. Concentration of 7% Picaridin provides protection for about 1-2 hours and 20% Picaridin provides 4-5 hours of protection. Picaridin is a synthetic compound developed from a plant extract from the genus Piper, the same genus that produces table pepper. Picaridin has been available since 1998 in Europe but was approved for sale in the U.S.A. only in 2005. AS with DEET, the EPA has concluded that the normal use of picaridin does not present a health concern. Picaridin is sometimes preferred over DEET because it is odorless, non-greasy, and does not dissolve plastics or other synthetics. Repellents that include picaridin include Cutter Advanced, Sawyer Premium and Repel Smart Spray.
- With any type of insect repellent, remember not to apply to a child's hands, eyes, mouth, or cut or irritated skin.
- And finally, children should wash off repellents when they return indoors.

For further questions/concerns regarding Zika and its prevention, please do not hesitate to consult your pediatrician.