

What Employers Should Know about the Zika Virus



The media has been filled recently with reports on the Zika virus, which is spread through mosquito bites. The mosquitoes known to transmit the virus to humans aren't present in Canada. But workers travelling to or working in Central and South America and the Caribbean, where these mosquitos *do* live, can be at risk of contracting the virus. In fact, the Public Health Agency of Canada has recently confirmed travel-related cases of Zika virus.

Because employers have a duty to protect workers from contracting illnesses and diseases such as the Zika virus, you should have basic information about this illness if your workers are at risk of exposure to it.

Twenty to twenty-five percent of people infected with the Zika virus are believed to develop symptoms, including low-grade fever, joint pain, red eyes, rash and generalized symptoms such as muscle pain, physical weakness, lack of energy and headaches.

The incubation period of the Zika virus ranges from 3-12 days. The disease symptoms are usually mild and last for 2-7 days. Most people recover fully without severe complications and hospitalization rates are low.

But pregnant women or those considering becoming pregnant should exercise particular care. In Nov. 2015, a Brazilian investigation indicated an average twenty-fold increase in the incidence of microcephaly (abnormally small head) among newborns born in areas where the Zika virus was known to be in circulation.

Currently, there's no prophylaxis, vaccine or treatment for the Zika virus. Treatment is generally limited to symptom relief.

So what can workers do to avoid getting the Zika virus? They should take steps to protect themselves from mosquito bites, including using insect repellent, protective clothing, mosquito nets, and screened doors and windows.