

Locally Acquired Zika Virus Infections in the United States:

Are Your Employees at Risk?

Reports about the Zika virus continue to make the news, most recently for locally acquired cases found in Florida. While research continues on the potential health effects of infection, the virus is already linked to microcephaly and other birth defects in infants born to women infected with the virus during pregnancy. It is known that the virus is transmitted via mosquito bite, sex and blood transfusion.

Our previous article, [*“Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Expands Travel Alert For the Zika Virus to Additional Regions: Are Your Employees at Risk?”*](#), provided information about steps your organization can take to protect employees traveling to regions where Zika virus transmission is occurring.

More countries have been added to the CDC travel advisory notices and now multiple locally acquired cases have been identified in Florida. Therefore, you have to consider your employees working here and overseas, as well as traveling to certain U.S. and foreign locations.



The potential risks to your organization from an employee infected with the Zika virus can include medical costs, lost workdays, temporary or permanent disability claims, lost productivity and loss of key personnel. Additional losses could include workers compensation claims for injuries to the employee (depending upon the jurisdiction), and even possible claims against an organization brought by the children of employees born with defects alleged to be associated with exposure to the virus during the employees' work obligations.

[Click here](#) to see where the mosquitos that transmit Zika virus may be found. Here are some steps you can take to help protect your U.S. employees working in these areas:

- Provide information to your employees about Zika virus infection risks and prevention. The CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html> has a variety of communication resources that you can use to educate your employees, including posters with information about mosquito bite prevention. Your local health department may also be able to provide you with information specific to your region.
- Control mosquitos on your company property by eliminating standing water, making sure windows and doors are closed when not in use, and using screens for open windows. If you are seeing mosquitos on your property, consult with a pest management company to determine other options for control.

- If you have employees that work outside or work in areas with doors that are open for extended periods of time (i.e. warehouses, loading docks), provide training to those employees about steps they can take to prevent mosquito bites including wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants and using mosquito repellent.
- Provide occupational health services for employees that may have been exposed or have developed symptoms or illness and counseling about the risks and protection for those employees who are pregnant or considering starting a family.



Taking simple proactive steps to educate your employees and implement preventative measures will protect your employees and your company.



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Donii Fox has over 20 years of experience in industrial hygiene and biological safety focusing on the biomedical research industry, academia and healthcare. Ms. Fox began her career managing industrial hygiene and biosafety programs at the University of New Mexico and later at the University of North Carolina. Her responsibilities included ensuring safe work practices for the handling of chemicals, infectious agents and recombinant DNA. In addition, she assisted in the development of operating procedures and policies, audited work areas and programs and provided input for the design and commissioning of containment laboratories (BSL3/ABSL3). Prior to joining Berkley Life Sciences, she was the ES&H Director at Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute where she managed all ES&H programs including fire and life safety, OSHA safety, environmental programs, biological, radiation and chemical safety and emergency management.

Ms. Fox has extensive experience with industrial hygiene sampling, biosafety levels 1, 2 and 3, select agents and toxins, evaluating research protocols and providing input on laboratory design. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational and Environmental Health Management from Ferris State University and a Master of Science degree in Public Health from the University of North Carolina.

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