

Illinois Senate Zika Virus Brief Testimony – 9/27/16

Senator Mulroe and colleagues, I am pleased to join this public health panel and am proud to represent the Illinois Association of Public Health Administrators. I serve as the Public Health Administrator for the Kendall County Health Department. It is my hope that our collective testimony will serve to affirm and inform your current understanding of Zika virus as well as the critical role that public health plays in public health surveillance and prevention of such evolving disease challenges. Public Health responders conduct surveillance on many kinds of disease and well-being trends, including Zika virus. Although Illinois is at low risk for Zika transmission at this time, the international movement of Zika virus is quite relevant to Illinoisans. Zika virus is both hazardous and preventable. In order to protect the public it is critical to convey current information related to sexual transmission, travel care, and repellent coverage.

As you know, Zika can be sexually transmitted. Persons with Zika can pass it to their unprotected partners even if no obvious symptoms are manifested. Continuing research may further explain:

- More about sexual transmission from men and from women.
- To what extent the virus can be passed through saliva during intimate exchange.
- The distinction between birth defect risk factors when the virus is passed to a pregnant woman through mosquito bite versus through sexual transmission.

The mosquitoes that spread Zika usually do not live at elevations above 6,500 feet. People who travel in areas above this elevation are at a very low risk of getting Zika from a mosquito unless they travel through areas of lower elevation. Because there is no vaccine or treatment for Zika, people traveling in areas with Zika should take steps to prevent infection.

These steps should include:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use insect repellents such as DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

- Pregnant and breastfeeding women can also use these repellents, including DEET.
- To apply repellents to children older than two months, adults should spray insect repellent onto hands and then apply to a child.
- Mosquito netting can be used to cover babies younger than 2 months old in carriers, strollers, or cribs to protect them from mosquito bites.
- Pre -treat clothing and gear with permethrin.
- Stay and sleep in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms.
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net if air conditioned or screened rooms are not available.
- Pregnant women should give great consideration for travel to areas in which Zika virus is prevalent.
- Avoid, clear, or treat areas in which standing water may breed mosquitoes.

Thank you for allowing those of us who are your state public health and local public health responders to speak to you about this important topic today.

Amaal V.E. Tokars
Executive Director/Public Health Administrator



KENDALL COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT



811 W. John St.
Yorkville, IL 60560
Office: (630) 553-8097
Facsimile: (630) 553-9506
ATokars@Co.kendall.il.us
www.KendallHealth.Org