



Survey Finds Americans Still Know Little to Nothing About Zika Virus

Health officials in the U.S. are scrambling to prepare for local outbreaks of Zika this summer, but a new survey finds few Americans know much about the mosquito virus — which can cause severe birth defects if a woman is infected during pregnancy — or how it is spread.

“I was a little bit surprised that six of 10 adults say they know little about Zika given all the exposure,” Ginny Ehrlich, CEO of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, told TODAY. “I think there is a lot of confusion, as is represented by the polling, in how it is transmitted other than by a mosquito bite.”

Aedes mosquitoes spread Zika through bites, but it can also be transmitted sexually. The virus lives in semen and most cases involve a man spreading it to his female partner, though there is one case of a man spreading it to another man.

Zika causes numerous birth defects, including microcephaly, a condition where the baby’s head is smaller than normal because of stalled development. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that people wait six months if a man displays signs of Zika and to hold off for eight weeks if either partner has been to an area where Zika is spreading.

The findings are important because lack of understanding about Zika could lead to accidental transmission. According to the National Campaign about 45 percent of pregnancies are unplanned. This means that an unplanned pregnancy could lead to an unplanned Zika transmission.

To understand what people know — and don’t — about Zika, the organization conducted a phone survey of 1,009 adults, ages 18 to 45.

The results show people are still confused about Zika.

- 64 percent say they know little or nothing about Zika
- 66 percent overall don’t understand how Zika spreads through sexual contact
- 86 percent of those aware that Zika can be transmitted sexually said they have NO plans to change their sexual behavior
- 88 percent of those aware that Zika can be transmitted sexually said they have NO plans to change what contraception they use
- 67 percent said that concerns about Zika have not caused them to be more mindful about getting pregnant or postponing pregnancy

Because of the dangers Zika poses to babies, the National Campaign recommends that people act carefully when it comes to sex.

“Because Zika is transmitted through sexual contact, we know the best method would be a combination of a contraceptive method and a condom to prevent the spread of Zika and an unplanned pregnancy,” said Ehrlich.

She praises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the WHO for their efforts, but says the study reveals people are missing the message.

“There is a real opportunity for people around the country to educate themselves in general and think about what this means for them,” Ehrlich said.