

ZIKA VIRUS



INFORMATION FOR SEAFARERS

If you're on board a ship travelling to a country affected by the current outbreak of the Zika virus disease, this advice will help you and other crew members protect yourselves.

KEY FACTS

- Zika virus disease is caused by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito – the same mosquito that spreads dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever.
- People with Zika virus disease usually have a mild fever, skin rash and conjunctivitis (red eyes) for 2-7 days.
- There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available.
- The best way to prevent the disease is by protecting yourself against mosquito bites.
- The virus occurs in tropical areas with large mosquito populations, and is known to circulate in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific.
- Based on available evidence, the World Health Organisation is not recommending travel or trade restrictions related to Zika virus disease.

HEALTH RISKS

- For most people, the symptoms are mild but little is yet known about the complications of the disease.
- The highest health risk appears to be to women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, as the virus may be linked to an increase in babies born with microcephaly (small heads due to abnormal brain development) in Brazil.
- Spread of the virus through blood transfusion and sexual contact have been reported.

SYMPTOMS

- The incubation period (the time from exposure to symptoms) of Zika is likely to be a few days.
- The symptoms – which include fever, skin rashes, conjunctivitis (red eyes), muscle and joint pain, tiredness and headache – are similar to other infections, such as dengue.
- The symptoms are usually mild and normally last for 2-7 days.
- Alert the ship's master or medical officer if you think you have symptoms of Zika virus disease.

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TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment for Zika virus disease. Treatment is for the symptoms only. If you get infected by the Zika virus:

- Take plenty of rest.
- Drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Treat pain and fever with common medicines.
- If your symptoms worsen, alert the ship's master and seek medical care and advice from the ship's medical officer.

PREVENTION

The best way to prevent Zika – and other diseases that are transmitted by mosquitoes – is by preventing mosquito bites when docked or ashore in one of the affected countries:

- Use insect repellent.
- Wear clothes (preferably light-coloured) that cover as much of the body as possible.
- Use physical barriers such as screens, closed doors and windows.
- Sleep under mosquito nets.
- Empty, clean or cover containers that hold water – such as buckets – so that places where mosquitoes can breed are removed.
- During outbreaks, health authorities may advise that spraying of insecticides be carried out.
- Insecticides recommended by the WHO Pesticide Evaluation Scheme may also be used as larvicides to treat relatively large water containers.
- If you have Zika, prevent mosquito bites during the first week of infection as the virus can be found in the blood and spread to other people through mosquito bites.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE TO WOMEN SEAFARERS WHO ARE PREGNANT OR PLANNING TO BECOME PREGNANT

Until more is known about the potential link between Zika virus in pregnant women and microcephaly in their new-born babies, if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, you should take extra care to protect yourself from mosquito bites (see Prevention).

- If you are pregnant and suspect that you may have Zika virus disease, consult the ship's medical officer for close monitoring during your pregnancy, or seek medical advice in port.
- Some countries have advised women to consider postponing planned pregnancies.

The ITF will continue to monitor the situation and keep inspectors and seafarers up-to-date with developments as and when appropriate. You can also keep yourself informed by visiting the WHO website at www.who.int/emergencies/zika-virus/en/.