HONOLULU -- Recently, Zika has been making headlines in various news sources.

Zika is a virus spread mainly by the bite of a mosquito species known as Aedes. Such mosquitoes also spread the viruses of dengue and chikungunya, as well, and they tend to bite both during the day and the night.

Mosquitoes that spread this virus lay their eggs near standing water.

The Zika virus can be passed from sex, pregnancy or a blood transfusion. Blood donations, which test positive for Zika, are removed from the blood supply.

Symptoms of Zika are usually mild; some individuals may even be asymptomatic. Symptoms include fever, rash, headache, joint pain, red eyes and muscle pain. These may last from a few days to a week.
If you contract the Zika virus, you are recommended to get proper rest, drink plenty of fluids and take acetaminophen to decrease fever or discomfort. Until dengue fever is ruled out, avoid taking aspirin or anti-inflammatories, as either can increase the risk of bleeding.

Many people are concerned about Zika due to it being a known cause for birth defects, which include miscarriage, stillbirth and microcephaly, a condition in which the head of a baby is much smaller than expected.

Other defects include calcium deposits in the brain indicating possible brain damage, extra fluid in the brain, absent or poorly formed brain structures, damage to the eye, hearing loss, or damage to the brain affecting nerves, muscles and bones.

At this moment, it does not seem that Zika infection in a woman who is not pregnant would be a risk for birth defects in future pregnancies after the virus has cleared from her blood.

You can prevent Zika by taking measures to prevent mosquito bites. To remain free of the virus, you are recommended to wear long-sleeved shirts and pants, as well as clothing that is pretreated with permethrin or insecticide.

It is also suggested you use insect repellents registered by the Environmental Protection Agency, or E.P.A., but these should not be used on children younger than 2 months. Lemon eucalyptus oil or para-menthan-diol are not safe for children younger than 3 years old; keep these children in mosquito netting instead. Additionally, stay in places with air conditioning, which also have window and door screens, or use a mosquito bed net if this is not an option.

Pregnant women should take caution before engaging in sexual intercourse with a partner who has contracted Zika, as the virus can be sexually transmitted. You can prevent sexual transmission of Zika by using condoms or by abstinence. Zika can be spread before symptoms start, while suffering symptoms, or after symptoms end, even from a person who may be asymptomatic.

Avoid traveling to areas affected by the Zika virus if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. You may check the website of the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC, for this information. Currently, Zika has been reported in Texas and Florida; international locations include Africa and Mexico, as well as Central and South America.

Unfortunately, there is no medicine or vaccine for Zika, as of yet.

For more information about the Zika virus, visit the CDC website at https://www.cdc.gov/zika/.

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