



A spotlight on the 2018 hurricane season — will the Zika virus pose new threats?

BY DR. ANTONIO CRESPO, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 06/08/18 06:00 AM EDT
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With the start of the 2018 hurricane season comes renewed concern about the potential spread of mosquito-borne infectious disease, including the Zika virus. Last year's hurricane season was one of the most active on record, resulting in conditions that created a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

There is no vaccine or treatment for those who contract Zika, which is known to spread through infected mosquitoes and can also be sexually transmitted. Much progress has been made in culling the population of mosquitoes that transmit Zika both here in the U.S. and in nations where the most recent outbreaks have occurred. However, the virus is still present and this summer we must remain prepared, protected and vigilant.

Along with other infectious disease specialists, I've closely followed the spread of Zika in Florida. Zika screening is now integrated into our emergency response and obstetrics procedures at [Orlando Health](#). Many people infected with Zika will have only mild or no symptoms, making it difficult to detect. Symptoms can include rash, fever, headache, joint and muscle pain as well as conjunctivitis or red-eye.

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Women who are pregnant or who are trying to become pregnant and have been in an area with active transmission of the Zika virus should be tested if they develop symptoms or have any concerns as a result of an ultrasound. The same goes for women who have had sex with a partner who lived or traveled to areas where Zika is present.

The widespread presence of the Zika virus in the Western Hemisphere was not confirmed until 2015. Since 2016 there have been more than 1,471 babies born in the U.S. to mothers who contracted Zika. Sixty-four of those babies were born with birth defects, and eight additional babies failed to survive. The greatest concern from Zika remains its potential to cause microcephaly and other birth defects.

Following Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma last year, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported Zika outbreaks in the continental U.S., including Florida and Texas. In addition, [the CDC currently advises pregnant women against travel to Puerto Rico](#), where the public health impact from Hurricane Maria will likely be measured for years to come.

Experts are predicting a slightly above average number of hurricanes this year. Luckily, adult mosquitoes from the Aedes species which transmit Zika do not generally survive high winds during a hurricane. And while large populations of floodwater mosquitoes can result from post-hurricane flooding, most of these are considered “nuisance” mosquitoes, meaning they do not spread viruses that make people sick.

But that certainly doesn't mean we should let our guard down. As the atmosphere warms this summer, there is potential for heavy rainfall. Even inland areas not previously threatened may be impacted by hurricanes this year. This means the number of disease-carrying mosquitoes may go up, especially in locations where there are pools of stagnant or standing water.

The CDC website is constantly updated with information about [international travel](#) and the risk of Zika. The same is true for locations within the U.S. where [Zika is present](#).

Residents left with the unfortunate task of cleaning up after a hurricane must take steps to help control mosquitoes in and around their homes. All items that hold water like toys, pools, or tires should be emptied, cleaned or thrown away.

If you are involved in clean up efforts, you are advised to wear preferably light colored pants and long sleeves outdoors. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) has an approved list of mosquito repellents which should be applied frequently on exposed skin. For those without air-conditioning, the use of screens on doors and windows is also recommended to keep mosquitoes out.

While there have been tremendous strides made in fighting Zika, we cannot allow complacency to keep us from being prepared for future outbreaks. In the battle against Zika and other mosquito-borne viruses, caution is critical.

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