

# Let's all act now to defuse the Zika threat in North Texas

Personal protection is key, say **Zachary Thomas** and **Dr. Christopher Perkins**

Another mosquito-borne illness can affect us all if we are not careful. The Zika virus threat is upon us, but there are things we can do to reduce its impact.

In the absence of a vaccine, personal protection is the best way to fight all mosquito-borne viruses. At home and as you travel, you should always use the "four D's" to protect yourself and your loved ones from mosquitoes:

- **DEET:** All day, every day. Whenever you're outside, use insect repellents that contain DEET or other EPA-approved repellents.
- **Dress:** Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing while outside.

- **Drain:** Remove all standing water in and around your home.

- **Dusk and Dawn:** Limit out-

door activities during dusk and dawn hours, when mosquitoes are most active.

Additionally, as you travel, especially to tropical areas like Central and South America and the Caribbean, you should stay in a hotel or place with air-conditioning or one that has screens on windows and doors. Use a mosquito net if you sleep outside or in a room without window screens.

Pregnant women and those planning to get pregnant should take extra precautions to protect their unborn children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends:

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is happening.

- Pregnant women who do travel to one of these areas should first talk to their doctors or other health care providers and strictly follow prescribed steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.

- Pregnant women should discuss their male partner's potential exposure to mosquitoes and any history of Zika-like symptoms.

While transmission of Zika virus is primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito, sexual transmission is possible. Sexual partners can protect each other by abstaining from sex or by using condoms consistently and correctly during sex.

The most important thing returning travelers can do to protect Dallas County from a Zika virus outbreak is to prevent further mosquito bites when they return home. The mosquitoes that can spread Zika virus are already here in Dallas County. If a person with Zika is bitten by a mosquito, that mosquito can become infected with the virus and then bite and infect another person. That's why we encourage individuals who travel and develop symptoms to seek medical attention and get tested for Zika virus.

Dallas County Health and Hu-

man Services was one of the first local health departments in the nation to test for Zika virus. Testing locally results in a faster turnaround and more effective response. This, in turn, will help us control a potential public health crisis.

We will continue to communicate with our local, state and federal partners to make sure we have the most current information and share it widely with Dallas County residents, the medical community and our response partners. In cooperation with all of our municipalities and residents, we can manage the threat of Zika virus in Dallas County.



*Zachary Thompson is director of Dallas County Health and Human Services. Dr.*



*Christopher Perkins is the county medical director. To reach*

*them, or to get more information about Zika virus, go to [dallascounty.org/hhs](http://dallascounty.org/hhs).*

## Zika facts

**82:** U.S. cases of Zika, as of Wednesday  
**22:** States reporting travel-associated cases

**0:** States reporting locally acquired cases

**12:** Cases reported in Texas, second-most (Florida has 21)

## About the virus

- About 1 in 5 people infected with Zika virus get sick

- The most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis (red eyes). Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache. Symptoms last from several days to a week.

- People usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika.

There have been reports of a serious birth defect, microcephaly, in babies of mothers who had Zika while pregnant. The linkage is still being studied, but special precautions are recommended for pregnant women.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cdc.gov/zika/geo/](http://cdc.gov/zika/geo/).