Testing for Zika: Frequently Asked Questions

Zika is a virus. People usually get Zika through a mosquito bite—but not a bite from *any* mosquito.

- The type of mosquito linked to the current outbreak lives in parts of Central and South America, Mexico, the Caribbean and other places listed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Most people who get infected with Zika do not get sick. For those who do get sick, the sickness is usually mild. Most people recover on their own. However, Zika may cause birth defects.

Your health care provider may want to test you for Zika virus if:

- You are pregnant now, and you traveled to a Zika-affected area while pregnant
- You have symptoms of Zika, like fever, rash, joint pain and/or conjunctivitis (red eyes)

What are the tests for Zika?

There are two types. Health care providers may use one or both.

- The first test is called "**RT-PCR**" or just "**PCR**." This is a blood or urine test. It shows if Zika virus is in your blood or urine. This test works best when it is done within a week of getting sick. (Over time, it gets harder to find the virus with this test.) A positive result means you are infected now *or* were infected recently. A negative result usually means that you do not have Zika now, but even with a negative result, you might have had Zika, and more testing is needed.

- The second test is called "**serology**" or "**IgM testing**." This is a blood test. It shows if your body was fighting off Zika. Your body makes antibodies to fight specific viruses; this test shows if your body was making antibodies to fight Zika. This test is most useful when done between four days and three months after you have symptoms. During that time, the body is making antibodies to fight Zika. The antibodies your body makes for Zika are very similar to the antibodies for other viruses, like dengue or West Nile Virus. As a result, it can be difficult, and sometimes impossible, to tell with which virus you may have been infected.

Your provider should explain to you why he or she is using one or both tests. The test chosen is usually based on the timing of your symptoms and the timing of your travel to a Zika-affected area.

How can I get tested for Zika virus?
Talk to your health care provider. Report your symptoms and travel, and ask if you should get tested. If your provider agrees that you should get tested, he or she will collect your urine and/or blood and then work directly with the City's Public Health Lab to get your samples tested.

How soon will I get my results?
Results of RT-PCR testing are usually ready a few days after the sample arrives at the Public Health Lab. Results of serology testing can take up to 21 days after the sample arrives at the Public Health Lab. In some cases, the lab may need to do a second round of serology testing to make sure you have Zika, instead of another, similar infection, like dengue fever. If that happens, the second blood sample should be collected three weeks after the first sample was collected; the results will take an additional 21 days.

Who will give me the results?
Your test results will be sent to your health care provider. Your provider will then share them with you and will counsel you on next steps, depending on the results.

More Information on Zika:

- nyc.gov/health/zika
- cdc.gov/zika