

PRETEST COUNSELING CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

FOR ASYMPTOMATIC PREGNANT WOMEN WITH EXPOSURE TO AREAS WITH A CDC ZIKA TRAVEL NOTICE



This guide describes recommendations for pretest counseling for asymptomatic pregnant women living in an area with a CDC Zika travel notice, as well as those who previously lived in, had an extended stay, or frequently travel to an area with a CDC Zika travel notice before or during their pregnancy. For pregnant women who live in or frequently travel to these areas who do not have symptoms of Zika, CDC recommends testing at the start of prenatal care and throughout pregnancy, unless they have a positive test. For those who have symptoms, testing is recommended at the time of symptom onset.

This material includes sample scripts to guide discussions with your patients about the complexity of Zika testing and the testing process. Because a lot of content is outlined for discussion, consider providing the complementary [information sheet](#) to support messaging and ensure that patients understand what they are being told.

Pregnant women coming in for Zika testing may feel worried or anxious. Support them by providing clear and easy to understand information, avoiding technical terms, and expressing empathy by acknowledging their concerns and feelings during pretesting counseling.

Recommendation

Sample Script

Provide the patient with information on the complexity of Zika testing.

You may be at risk of getting Zika at any time during your pregnancy since you live in an area where Zika is being spread by mosquitoes. Many people who get infected with Zika do not have symptoms, so you could get infected and not know you have Zika.

Because Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause birth defects, I think it is best to test you for Zika during your pregnancy.

Before we begin, I would like to give you some information on what to expect throughout this process.

Patients should be informed that more than one Zika test may be required before a final result is determined.

You may need up to three different tests before we can find out whether you have Zika or not. One test looks for Zika genetic material, called RNA, which can stay in the body for a couple of weeks after a person first becomes infected. Another test looks for antibodies, which your body makes to fight infections. If this test detects antibodies, a third test may help us know if the antibodies are for Zika or for another similar virus. We want to be sure we take all of the necessary steps to ensure your results are accurate because the result of one test may not tell us the whole story, and you may need to get additional tests to find out if you recently got Zika. Each test can take different amounts of time to receive results, which I know can be frustrating. As your healthcare provider I am here to answer any questions you may have.

- Reassure the patient that this method of testing is normal.
- Consider providing the fact sheet [“What You Should Know about Zika Virus Testing for Pregnant Women Living in an Area with Zika.”](#)

Patients should be informed that it can be challenging to understand test results

It can be hard to understand Zika test results for a number of reasons.

Because you may have been exposed to an area where local mosquitoes continue to spread Zika, you may have been previously infected and already developed antibodies against Zika. Antibodies can stay in your body for different amounts of time. Because of this, antibody test results may not tell us if you were infected in the past or if you were infected recently. It may be possible to tell if you were recently infected if your test results show evidence of Zika RNA or if you tested negative for antibodies at one point during your pregnancy and then later tested positive for antibodies.

Also, mosquitoes can carry many viruses, like dengue virus, which is very similar to Zika. So if you were infected in the past, it may be difficult to know which virus you have been infected with.

Therefore, we may need to do additional testing to try to figure out if you actually had or have Zika.

- Ask the patient if she has any questions before you move forward with providing information on the testing process.

Recommendation

Sample Script

Discuss each type of Zika test with the patient

There could potentially be up to three types of tests that can help with determining whether you have Zika or not.

RNA Testing

Let the patient know that you may order a test to look for evidence of Zika virus.

To find out if you have evidence of a recent Zika virus infection, I may order a test that looks for the genetic material of Zika, known as RNA. This can be found in blood and urine.

If your Zika RNA test comes back with a positive result, it likely means that you have Zika.

If this test comes back negative, it means that another test is needed. A negative test could mean that you previously had Zika, but your body cleared the virus from your system, or that you never had Zika infection.

- Ask the patient if they have any questions before you move forward.

Antibody Testing

Let the patient know that you may order a test to look for antibodies. Define this term as it may be unfamiliar and inform the patient of what to expect next.

Another way to find out if you were recently infected with Zika is a blood test to look for evidence that your body fought off a Zika virus infection. This test looks for antibodies, which are proteins that your body makes to fight infection. Zika virus infection, like some other similar infections, may result in antibodies staying in the body for months after infection. Antibodies may be produced even if you have no symptoms.

If your antibody test comes back with a negative result, that means you were not recently infected with Zika. This is an important for us to know in case you become infected with Zika in the future.

If your antibody test comes back with a positive result, this could mean many things: recent infection with Zika virus, previous infection with Zika or another flavivirus; recent flavivirus infection, like dengue; or a false positive result (meaning the test shows you have Zika when you weren't actually infected).

- Ask the patient if they have any questions before you move forward with providing information on the next type of Zika testing.

Confirmatory Antibody Testing

Inform patients of this final type of test that can help differentiate Zika infection from other similar infections.

If your antibody test is positive, another test may be needed to help determine whether the antibodies are for Zika or another similar virus. This test may not be able to distinguish between Zika and other viruses, such as dengue, and will **not** tell us if you have recent Zika virus infection or a previous infection. This test takes the longest to receive results because I will have to send the results to a specialized lab and then work with the state or local health department to interpret the results.

- Ask the patient if they have any questions on what to expect during each type of Zika testing.

Inform patients of each what each test result could mean for their pregnancy.

Now we'll go over what each test result could mean for your pregnancy.

If Zika test results are positive.

If you test positive for Zika, I will need to watch your pregnancy more closely. I may do more ultrasounds or other tests to check for your fetus's growth and development.

If Zika test results are not clearly positive or negative.

Sometimes test results will not come back as a clear negative or positive. If this happens, I'd rather be more cautious and still do more ultrasounds and other tests to closely monitor your pregnancy.

If Zika test results are negative.

If your test results are negative, I will do an ultrasound to check the growth and development of your baby and check for any signs of Zika virus infection. If I see any signs of Zika during the ultrasound, then I may order additional tests. If there are no signs of Zika, we will continue with routine prenatal care but I may test at different points in your pregnancy to know if you got infected while you were pregnant.