



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY *Messenger* Public Health Laboratory

February 2016

Zika virus – Emerging Infectious Disease for 2016

No sooner than a new year unfolding, we witness the rabid media attention to another new virus. But what are the facts and what is the hype?

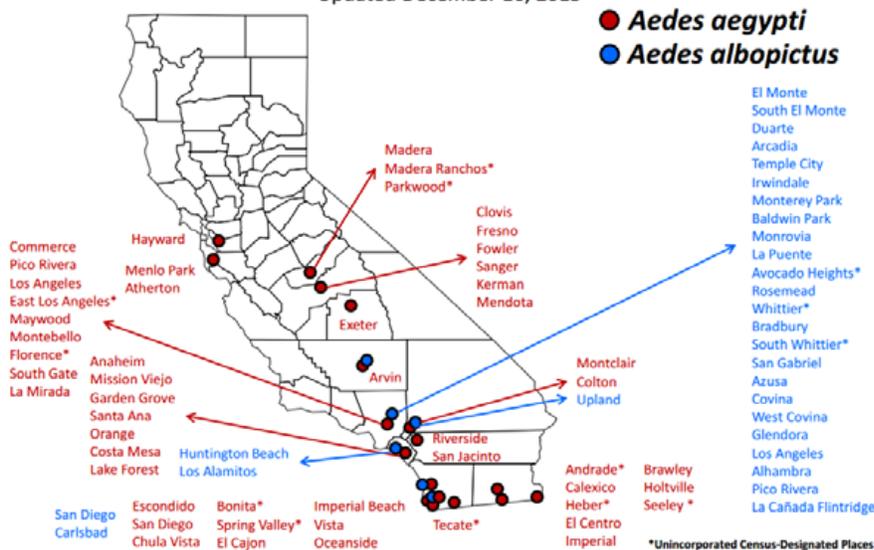
First, is it a new virus? No. It was discovered in central Africa in 1947 and has caused infections in a tropical band of countries from Africa to Indonesia since it was first detected. As recently as 2007, it caused a large number of cases in French Polynesia.

Where is it? The virus is causing infections—a large but unknown number of cases in Caribbean, Central and South American countries, being transmitted by the same mosquito species—*Aedes aegyptii*-- that spreads Dengue virus, Yellow Fever and other virus of the same group--Flavivirus

Is it here in a California? A few travelers returning to California from countries where the virus is active have been determined to be infected, but so far no indigenous cases have been found. The vector mosquito has been detected at times in some California counties (see Map), but for transmission to become established a traveler carrying the virus must return and get bitten by the right type of mosquito—odds are low for this occurrence. Florida and Texas may see indigenous Zika virus transmission as the vector mosquito is more often seen in those states.

Aedes aegypti and *Aedes albopictus* Mosquitoes Detection Sites in California, 2011-2015

Updated December 16, 2015



Is this a dangerous virus? Most individuals who get infected either don't know they are infected or have a mild illness that is unlikely to prompt medical care. Among the hundreds of thousands of cases in South America, some women have given birth to babies with microcephaly—that is associated with Zika virus infection. To be certain, the virus has entered a new population with the presence of abundant, competent vector mosquitos, and has spread rapidly. We seem to be seeing the tip of an iceberg—the few very seriously affected individuals among a huge number of infections. It is almost certainly transmitted sexually—a dimension that was not expected.

How do I protect myself? Fight the Bite. Use all the readily available means to protect yourself from Zika virus—as well as Dengue, Chikungunya, and other mosquito-borne viruses by avoiding mosquito bites—with indoor and outdoor protection and DEET. There is currently no vaccine—as there is for Yellow Fever virus—nor any specific treatment. Pregnant women should consider not travelling to countries where the virus is known to be circulating.

Can you test for it? Testing of blood and other specimens is available through the SLO Public Health Laboratory referring to the State Laboratory and the CDC. Call SLO Public Health Communicable Disease Control 781-5500 for information if a patient presents with symptoms and signs of infection after travel to a country where transmission is occurring.