

PRETESTING COUNSELING CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

For Pregnant Women with Possible Exposure to Zika or Symptom Onset 2-12 Weeks Ago



This guide describes recommendations for conducting pretesting counseling for pregnant women if they or their sex partner live in or have recently traveled to an area with active Zika transmission. CDC recommends testing for pregnant women who may have been exposed to Zika, whether or not they have symptoms. This material includes sample scripts to guide discussions with your patients about the complexity of Zika testing and the testing process with patients. Because a lot of content is outlined for discussion, make additional information available 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 them with 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.

Use one or both of the two following sentences to begin the discussion depending on the clinical scenario:

1) You may be at risk of having Zika since you or your sex partner recently traveled to (replace "recently traveled to" with "live in" as appropriate) an area where Zika virus is spreading by mosquitoes more than two weeks ago. (For those without symptoms: You could be at risk even if you or your partner do not have symptoms).

OR/AND

2) You may be at risk of having Zika because within the past 2–12 weeks you had sex without a condom with a person who traveled to (replace "traveled to" with "lives in" as appropriate) a Zika affected area. (For those without symptoms: You could be at risk even if you or your partner do not have symptoms).

Based on what you've told me, I think it is best to move forward with testing you for Zika. Before we begin, I would like to provide you with some helpful 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 only need one test to find out whether you have Zika. However, you may need up to three different tests before we can find out whether you have Zika or not 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 had a Zika virus infection. We want to be sure we take all of the necessary steps to make sure your results are accurate. Each test can take different amounts of time to receive results. I know this can be frustrating, but 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 Who May Have Been Exposed to Zika 2-12 Weeks Ago."](#)

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. Mosquitoes can carry many viruses, like dengue virus, which is very similar to Zika. So if someone has been infected with these other viruses in the past, it may be difficult to know which virus you have been infected with.

It is possible that the test will:

- 1) detect signs that your body cleared viruses, other than Zika, from your system,
- 2) detect signs that your body recently cleared Zika virus from your system, or
- 3) detect that you currently have Zika.

Therefore, we may need to do additional testing to figure out whether you actually have or had Zika. Once I know which virus infected you, I will know how best to care for you during your pregnancy.

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

Recommendation

Sample Script

Discuss each step of the testing process with the patient

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

Step two- If the patient requires further testing, inform the patient that positive antibody test results will require further testing and provide them with information on what to possibly expect next.

Step three- If the patient requires further testing after the Zika RNA test, inform patients that further testing will be needed if they test negative for Zika RNA.

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

If Zika test results are positive.

If Zika test results are inconclusive.

If Zika test results are negative.

There could potentially be up to three steps of testing before I can determine whether you have Zika or not.

I am going to start step one of the testing process by ordering a test to look for evidence that your body fought off a recent Zika infection. This test looks for antibodies, which are proteins that your body makes usually 2–12 weeks after an infection.

If your antibody test comes back with a negative result, that means you were not recently infected with Zika, and we will continue our original plan of care for your pregnancy.

If your antibody test comes back with a positive result, I will need to do more testing to determine whether or not you have or recently had Zika. The antibody test may be positive even when a person isn't actually infected with Zika for many reasons. One reason could be that the test is detecting antibodies to another virus that is similar to Zika, like dengue virus or West Nile virus. Another could be that the test is detecting antibodies from a Zika infection your body recently fought off.

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

If your first test for antibodies is positive, I will need to order a second test to make sure it's actually Zika and not another virus that is similar to Zika, like West Nile or dengue. This test looks for the genetic material of Zika, known as RNA. This material from the virus can be found in blood and urine.

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

If this test comes back negative, it may mean that you previously had Zika but your body cleared the virus from your system. It could also mean that you had an infection similar to Zika. We will need to do one more round of testing to figure out whether or not you actually have or recently had Zika.

- Ask the patient if they have any questions before you move forward with providing information on step three of testing

If your second test for Zika RNA is negative, I will need to order a third and final test to confirm whether the antibodies from the first test for Zika. 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 step of the testing process

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

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.

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

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.