
What is a communicable disease?

A communicable disease is one that is spread from one person to another through a variety of ways that include: contact with blood and bodily fluids; breathing in an airborne virus; or by being bitten an insect. They can cause illness varying from being very mild (head cold) to very severe (meningitis).

How do communicable diseases spread?

- How these diseases spread depends on the specific disease or infectious agent. Some ways in which communicable diseases spread are by:
 - Physical (direct) contact with an infected person, such as through touch (staphylococcus), sexual intercourse (gonorrhea, HIV, chlamydia), fecal/oral transmission (hepatitis A), or sharing oral/throat secretions (Strep throat, Mono, Meningococcal);
 - Contact with a contaminated surface or object (Norwalk virus), food (salmonella, E. coli);
 - Exposure to infected blood (HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis);
 - Bites from insects or animals capable of transmitting the disease (mosquito: malaria and yellow fever; flea: plague); and
 - Respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing (head cold, influenza, pneumonia, tuberculosis).

There are many types of communicable diseases; however, the focus of this article will be the viruses Zika, and Mumps (which have recently been prevalent in the news), as well as Influenza.

Zika Virus

Zika is an emerging infectious disease that is most commonly transmitted to people through mosquito bites. Zika is also transmitted through sexual contact from a person who has Zika to his or her sex partners. Zika virus outbreaks are occurring in multiple countries and in three US territories. The CDC has issued traveled notices for these areas. Information on these notices can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/geo/active-countries.html>.

Zika has been linked to birth defects in cases where the mother is pregnant while infected with the virus. The CDC is recommending that pregnant women (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/protect-yourself.html>) not travel to the areas where the Zika virus transmission is ongoing. If you are pregnant and have a partner who lives in or has traveled to an area with Zika, either do not have sex or if you do have sex, use condoms every time throughout your pregnancy.

Women who are trying to become pregnant or who are thinking about becoming pregnant should consult with their healthcare provider before traveling to these areas. More information can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika>. Information on this disease is quickly evolving. We recommend referring to the CDC website for the most up-to-date information.

Mumps

Although mumps is no longer common in the United States, due mainly to the introduction of the mumps vaccinations program in 1967, outbreaks still occur. Caused by a virus, classic symptoms of the mumps include puffy cheeks and swollen jaw. Headache, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and loss of appetite may also accompany the virus. The mumps virus is spread through saliva from the mouth, nose or throat. Complications from the mumps virus include, deafness, inflammation in areas of the body such as the brain, testicles and ovaries. The mumps vaccine, commonly given today as the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) is the best way to prevent the diseases. Check your immunization record or with your doctor to determine if you have received the mumps vaccine. More information on the mumps virus can be found on the Center for Disease Control website. <https://www.cdc.gov/mumps/index.html>

Influenza

Influenza season is here. The “flu” is caused by a number of influenza viruses. According to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, the flu is responsible for approximately 500 deaths and 3000 hospitalizations every year in Louisiana. Influenza activity is rising in Louisiana at this time. The CDC and LDH recommend that individuals over 6 months of age be vaccinated for the flu. It is not too late to get your flu vaccine! For more information about influenza, including prevention measures visit <https://www.cdc.gov/flu> .

What can you do to prevent infectious illness?

- Practice good hygiene. Wash your hands with warm water and soap or use alcohol-based rubs.
- Avoid sharing your personal items such as towels or razors with others
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from other to protect them from getting sick too, Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing.
- Avoid drinking and eating after other people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- Talk to your health care provider concerning any vaccines that may prevent or decrease the severity of infectious disease.

For more information:

www.cdc.gov & www.dhh.louisiana.gov