CDC urges vigilance for Zika following hurricanes, updates guidance

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

In the wake of recent hurricanes, pediatricians may see displaced families from areas with significant Zika outbreaks who need additional care.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging physicians to be vigilant for these women and children from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It also has updated its guidance on caring for infants who may have been exposed to Zika regardless of their hometown.

"There's a lot we still don't know about Zika, so it's very important for us to keep a close eye on these babies as they develop," CDC Director Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D., said in a news release. "Learning how best to support them will require a team approach between healthcare providers and families."

The CDC's revised recommendations were drafted with input with the Academy and other experts and are in response to changes in testing recommendations for pregnant women as well as new health issues in infants related to Zika.

In July, the CDC said asymptomatic pregnant women with limited exposure to Zika through travel or sex would not be tested routinely, although testing may be appropriate after discussing risks, benefits and limitations of tests with their doctor. It cited limitations of the available tests and decreasing prevalence of Zika cases, leading to false positives.

The probability of fewer women being tested routinely contributed to the updated guidelines on caring for infants. If a pregnant woman may have been exposed to Zika virus, her infant should receive a standard evaluation at birth and during each well-child visit, according to the CDC. That evaluation includes a comprehensive physical exam, vision screening, developmental monitoring and screening, and a newborn hearing screen at birth, preferably using auditory brainstem response (ABR) methodology, according to the CDC.

The need for additional testing is based on the infant's clinical findings and mother's Zika tests. Updates to the guidance are listed below.

**Infants with clinical findings consistent with Zika virus** can receive their clinical evaluations before or after hospital discharge. They should be sent to a hospital with subspecialty care only if "there is an urgent clinical need," the CDC said. However, health care providers need to be vigilant about additional Zika-related issues that have been identified in recent months, including diaphragmatic paralysis and postnatal hydrocephalus.

Infants in this group no longer need thyroid testing unless clinical symptoms indicate an issue and no longer need a diagnostic ABR test at 4-6 months if they passed a newborn screening using automated ABR.

**Infants without clinical findings consistent with Zika born to mothers with laboratory evidence of infection during pregnancy** should receive a comprehensive eye exam by an ophthalmologist by 1 month, the same as infants with indications of Zika.

**Infants without clinical findings consistent with Zika born to mothers without laboratory evidence of infection** need standard evaluations at birth and at well-child visits and no additional evaluations unless abnormalities are detected.

The full recommendations for evaluation and follow-up of all groups including an algorithm are available in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* at https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6641a1.htm?s_cid=mm6641a1_w.
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Since 2015, 98 babies in U.S. states and 137 babies in U.S. territories have been born with Zika-related birth defects, according to the CDC. Research has found about 5% of women with possible Zika infection had a baby with Zika-related birth defects.

Pediatricians should report suspected congenital Zika virus cases to their local health department and provide information to the CDC’s Zika Pregnancy and Infant Registry. The report to the registry should include information about a child's relocation from another jurisdiction if applicable.

Resources

- AAP resources, including videos for pediatricians and families
- CDC Zika guidance for health care providers on testing infants
- Information for parents on HealthyChildren.org