

1 **Zika Virus: New Clinical Syndromes and its Emergence in the Western Hemisphere**

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22 **Running title: Emergence of Zika virus**

23 **ABSTRACT**

24 Zika virus (ZIKV) had remained a relatively obscure flavivirus until a recent series of
25 outbreaks accompanied by unexpectedly severe clinical complications brought this virus into the
26 spotlight as an infection of global public health concern. In this review, we discuss the history
27 and epidemiology of ZIKV infection, recent outbreaks in Oceania and the emergence of ZIKV in
28 the Western Hemisphere, newly ascribed complications of ZIKV infection including Guillain-
29 Barré syndrome and microcephaly, potential interactions between ZIKV and dengue virus, and
30 the prospects for the development of antiviral agents and vaccines.

31

32 **Zika virus: history and epidemiology**

33 Zika virus (ZIKV) is a member of the *Flavivirus* genus of the *Flaviviridae* family, which
34 includes other globally relevant human pathogens such as dengue (DENV), yellow fever (YFV),
35 West Nile (WNV), Japanese encephalitis (JEV) and tick-borne encephalitis (TBEV) viruses (1,
36 2). ZIKV is an enveloped virus with an approximately 10.7 kilobase positive-sense RNA
37 genome. Similar to other flaviviruses, the ZIKV genome encodes a single polyprotein that is
38 cleaved post-translationally by host and viral proteases into three structural proteins (capsid (C),
39 pre-membrane (prM), and envelope (E)) and seven non-structural proteins (NS1, NS2A, NS2B,
40 NS3, NS4A NS4B, and NS5) (3, 4). C binds to the viral RNA to form a nucleocapsid, prM
41 prevents premature fusion with host membranes, and E mediates cellular attachment, entry,
42 and fusion (5). The viral nonstructural proteins regulate viral transcription and replication and
43 also attenuate host antiviral responses (1, 6, 7). ZIKV is a member of the Spondweni group
44 within the mosquito-borne clade of flaviviruses (**Figure 1**) and is closely related to the four
45 serotypes of DENV with approximately 43% amino acid identity across the viral polyprotein as
46 well as in the ectodomain of E.

47 ZIKV was first isolated in 1947 from a febrile sentinel rhesus monkey in the Zika forest, a
48 research station of the East African Virus Research Institute (now the Uganda Virus Research

49 Institute) in Entebbe, Uganda (8, 9). The virus was isolated subsequently from *Aedes africanus*
50 mosquitoes in the same forest (9-11), and multiple monkey species in the Zika forest were
51 found to be seropositive for ZIKV (11). Small mammals in the Zika forest (including squirrels,
52 tree rats, giant pouched rats, and civets) did not show serological evidence of ZIKV infection,
53 consistent with a model where primates (both humans and monkeys) are the primary vertebrate
54 hosts for ZIKV (10). Multiple species of *Aedes* mosquitoes contribute to enzootic maintenance
55 of ZIKV, but likely only a subset of these transmit the virus to humans (12, 13). There is
56 evidence of high rates of ZIKV seroprevalence in Africa and Asia (9, 14-17), although the
57 specificity of such assays is uncertain, given the significant serological cross-reactivity between
58 ZIKV and other flaviviruses (see below). In the decades following its discovery, ZIKV was
59 isolated from human patients sporadically during outbreaks in Africa and Southeast Asia (15,
60 18), but remained obscure due to the fairly benign nature of the infection (generally a self-
61 limiting febrile illness, see below).

62 ZIKV came to global attention in 2007, when it caused of an explosive outbreak in
63 Micronesia (18-21). On the island of Yap, it is estimated that approximately 75% of the
64 population became infected during a 4-month period (19). In the ensuing years, ZIKV spread
65 throughout Oceania (22-25) and then was detected in Brazil in early 2015 (26, 27). Although the
66 precise means by which ZIKV was introduced to the Western Hemisphere is unknown, the
67 presumption is that the virus came to Brazil from Polynesia via a viremic traveler or an infected
68 mosquito (2, 26, 28, 29). The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which can transmit ZIKV, is abundant in
69 Brazil and autochthonous transmission was established. The outbreak initially was concentrated
70 in Northeastern Brazil. However, the virus rapidly spread throughout Latin America and the
71 Caribbean, such that within one year most countries in the region have reported local
72 transmission (30-32). Further spread of the virus is anticipated and imported cases already have
73 been reported in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere in travelers returning from Latin
74 America and the Caribbean during the current outbreak (30, 33-35). The rate at which ZIKV has

75 spread through Latin America and the Caribbean since its introduction appears comparable to
76 chikungunya virus (CHIKV) after its introduction to the Western Hemisphere in late 2013,
77 suggesting that it reflects the abundance and competence of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes that
78 are used as vectors by both viruses, as well as the availability of a susceptible host population
79 (36). ZIKV genome sequences from Polynesia and South America are highly similar (2, 26, 29)
80 (approximately 99% nucleotide identity across the viral genome), but there are genetic
81 differences, for example 6 amino acid changes between the H/PF/2013 strain from French
82 Polynesia and the SPH2015 strain from Brazil (Genbank accession: KJ776791.1 and
83 KU321639.1) (37). Future studies are needed to determine whether such changes impact
84 disease pathogenesis, tropism, or vector competence. The ability of changes in viral sequence
85 to impact the epidemic potential of arboviruses was seen previously with CHIKV, where a small
86 number of mutations, including a A226V change in the E1 glycoprotein, enabled the virus to use
87 *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes as vectors, which have an expanded geographic range compared
88 to *Aedes aegypti*, facilitating epidemic spread into new areas (37-39).

89

90 **Modes of transmission**

91 *Vector-borne transmission.* ZIKV is a mosquito-transmitted virus (**Figure 2**). ZIKV has
92 been isolated from many species of *Aedes* mosquito, but only a subset of these are competent
93 vectors for transmission (including *Ae. aegypti*, *Ae. albopictus*, *Ae. hensilli*, and *Ae.*
94 *polynesiensis*) (9-13, 18, 21, 40-42). *Aedes aegypti* is thought to be the principal vector
95 spreading ZIKV during the current outbreak in Latin America and the Caribbean, likely due to
96 the urban abundance and anthropophilic nature of this mosquito (43). Monkeys are presumed
97 to serve as reservoir hosts for ZIKV, although the primary species has not been identified (11,
98 18). It is unclear whether ZIKV will become endemic in New World monkeys and establish a
99 sylvatic transmission cycle in Latin America analogous to YFV, or be maintained exclusively
100 through urban transmission cycles with no New World sylvatic cycle, similar to DENV (44).

101 Humans are amplifying hosts for ZIKV and urban cycles of transmission between humans and
102 mosquitoes sustain and cause epidemics. Indeed, the island of Yap in Micronesia experienced
103 an extensive ZIKV outbreak yet there are no non-human primates on this island (19). There
104 currently is no evidence that animals other than humans and non-human primates serve as
105 amplifying hosts for ZIKV, suggesting a mode of transmission similar to DENV, YFV, and
106 CHIKV. While mosquito-borne transmission clearly is the main cause of ZIKV outbreaks, other
107 modes of transmission have been reported.

108 *Blood-borne transmission.* As is the case for other blood-borne infections, a ZIKV
109 viremic donor could potentially contaminate the blood supply (45, 46) and cases of ZIKV
110 transmission through transfusions of donated blood have been reported in Brazil, although not
111 yet published. In many areas, including the United States, Canada, and Europe, the blood
112 supply already is screened by nucleic acid amplification tests to detect WNV (47-50). The same
113 approach, once a screening test becomes available, could be used to detect ZIKV, and plans
114 exist in several countries to screen the blood supply for ZIKV or to defer blood donation from
115 those who have travelled to countries where ZIKV is circulating. In the absence of an approved
116 diagnostic assay to detect ZIKV contamination, strategies are available to inactivate infectious
117 agents in the blood supply (46, 51).

118 *Sexual transmission.* There is evidence of sexual transmission of ZIKV (34, 52, 53), and
119 ZIKV RNA has been detected in semen (54, 55). To date, all reported sexually transmitted
120 cases of ZIKV infection have been from infected men to their female partners. Although some of
121 these cases were accompanied by hematospermia, infectious ZIKV was detectable in semen
122 even after viremia had cleared (undetectable ZIKV RNA in serum), arguing against blood-borne
123 transmission (54). Moreover, while other sexually transmitted infections cause hematospermia
124 (56), this has not been a common presentation of ZIKV infection, nor has it been evident in all
125 cases of sexually transmitted ZIKV (34). Recent reports of infectious ZIKV in urine, along with
126 the detection of ZIKV RNA in urine even after viremia has cleared (57), could be consistent with

127 ZIKV replication in urogenital tissues. ZIKV RNA has been detected in saliva (58) and infectious
128 ZIKV in saliva recently was reported. Due to the highly correlated nature of behaviors, sexual
129 and salivary transmission can be difficult to distinguish. Indeed, Kaposi's sarcoma-associated
130 herpesvirus initially was thought to be sexually transmitted, but subsequent findings indicated
131 that the primary mode of transmission was through saliva (59). Indeed, pigs can develop high
132 viral loads in the tonsils and transmit JEV through oronasal secretions, which demonstrates this
133 as a possible transmission route for flaviviruses (60). Although sexual transmission is unlikely to
134 be a major cause of ZIKV outbreaks, the presence of virus in semen warrants investigation,
135 especially given recent evidence that Ebola virus RNA can be detected in the semen of
136 survivors for months after the acute infection has cleared. Similarly, ZIKV RNA was detected in
137 semen 62 days after the onset of febrile symptoms (55). The immune privileged nature of the
138 testes may allow ZIKV to persist in this tissue. Such reservoirs have the potential to initiate new
139 transmission cycles from seemingly healthy individuals (61, 62). The growing number of
140 imported ZIKV cases in areas of the United States and Europe where local mosquito
141 transmission is less likely provides an opportunity to detect and determine the significance of
142 alternative transmission mechanisms (34).

143 *Maternal transmission.* ZIKV RNA has been detected in breast milk (63). As this route of
144 transmission has been documented for other flaviviruses (64-66), ZIKV-infected mothers may
145 be able to pass the virus to nursing children. However, it is not known whether infectious ZIKV is
146 present in breast milk nor its possible duration relative to acute infection, and ZIKV-infected
147 mothers are still encouraged to breastfeed their infants (67). Perinatal transmission of ZIKV was
148 documented in French Polynesia (63), but it is unknown whether this represented transmission
149 in breast milk, blood-borne transmission during delivery, or *in utero* transmission.

150 The question of *in utero* transmission has gained urgency as the emergence of ZIKV in
151 Brazil has coincided with an alarming increase in the number of cases of microcephaly, with the
152 Northeastern states reporting >4,000 cases over approximately four months, a more than 20-

153 fold increase from prior years (68-71). Microcephaly is a congenital abnormality in which the
154 fetal brain is underdeveloped (72, 73). There is not a standard definition of microcephaly, as
155 definitions range from a newborn head circumference ≤ 32 or 33 cm, or ≥ 2 or 3 standard
156 deviations below the mean for gestational age (69). Many factors during pregnancy can cause
157 microcephaly, including other viral infections (e.g., human cytomegalovirus, rubella virus, and
158 varicella-zoster virus), exposure to toxins (e.g., drugs or alcohol), and genetic mutations.
159 Microcephaly can be asymmetric, meaning a small head on an otherwise normally proportioned
160 body, or symmetric, meaning that the small head is proportional to a small overall body size; the
161 type of microcephaly can be characteristic of its etiology. Microcephaly can be diagnosed by
162 prenatal ultrasound, but generally not until the late second trimester and many cases are not
163 evident until after birth. The long-term effects of microcephaly can vary widely, from virtually no
164 defects to cognitive deficits and severe physical disability (73).

165 It is important to note that the majority of the microcephaly cases reported during the
166 current outbreak have yet to be confirmed or linked directly to ZIKV; in ongoing follow-up
167 studies, approximately one third of reported microcephaly cases had been corroborated, and
168 presumably some of these will be attributable to causes other than ZIKV infection (68, 70, 71).
169 Further complicating the analysis, the case definition for microcephaly has changed over the
170 course of the current outbreak: in December 2015 the Brazilian Ministry of Health adopted a
171 newborn head circumference ≤ 32 cm as the case definition, compared to the less stringent ≤ 33
172 cm cutoff used previously (69). Clearly, better data are required to assess the potential
173 connection between ZIKV infection and microcephaly; epidemiological studies, including case-
174 control and prospective cohort studies, are underway and should bring clarity to this question in
175 time. Nonetheless, accumulating evidence strongly suggests a causal role for ZIKV in the
176 development of microcephaly. In addition to the timing and geographic distribution of
177 microcephaly cases relative to ZIKV infections, data supporting trans-placental infection
178 includes the following: (i) detection of ZIKV RNA and sequencing of full-length viral genome

179 from the amniotic fluid of fetuses diagnosed with microcephaly by ultrasound in mothers who
180 reported previous ZIKV infection but were not viremic at the time of amniocentesis; (ii) detection
181 of ZIKV RNA and/or antigen in the tissues of three microcephalic infants who died shortly after
182 birth; (iii) detection of ZIKV RNA in the placenta from a microcephalic fetus after miscarriage;
183 (iv) Partial sequence of ZIKV genome and viral antigen detection in four fetal brain tissue
184 samples recovered from miscarriages and neonatal death; (v) sequencing of full-length ZIKV
185 RNA genome and visualization of ZIKV-like particles by electron microscopy in the fetal brain
186 from a terminated pregnancy (74-81). A recent report of anti-ZIKV IgM in the cerebral spinal
187 fluid of 12 infants with microcephaly also supports *in utero* infection with ZIKV.

188 Although other viruses can cross the placenta and cause microcephaly in humans
189 and/or animals, this presentation has never been associated previously with flaviviruses (82-86).
190 *In utero* infection with WNV has been studied, with no clear evidence of an association with
191 microcephaly (87-89). Furthermore, there are an estimated >390 million DENV infections
192 annually (including ~25 million estimated in Brazil (90)), so even a very low rate of DENV-
193 induced microcephaly would have been observed. While the mechanisms by which ZIKV may
194 cause microcephaly are unknown, the preliminary evidence and the severity of the disease has
195 prompted the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Public Health
196 Agency of Canada, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Public Health
197 England, among others, to recommend that women who are pregnant or planning to become
198 pregnant avoid travel to areas where ZIKV is circulating (in effect, nearly all of Latin America
199 and the Caribbean, among other locations) (74, 75, 80, 91, 92). Such travel advisories have
200 significant economic impact on the affected countries, especially with the approach of the 2016
201 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, in response to the potential for sexual
202 transmission of ZIKV, CDC has cautioned pregnant women against unprotected sex with
203 partners who have potential ZIKV exposure (34, 91, 93). Remarkably, health officials in several
204 Latin American and Caribbean countries have recommended that women postpone pregnancy

205 in response to the ZIKV outbreak. In the United States, pregnant women have become infected
206 while traveling to areas with active ZIKV transmission, or by sexual contact with ZIKV-infected
207 male partners. The outcomes of these ZIKV-exposed pregnancies have been variable, including
208 early pregnancy loss, elective termination, delivery of an infant with severe microcephaly, and
209 seemingly unaffected infants (80). Many unanswered questions remain about *in utero*
210 transmission of ZIKV infection and the development of microcephaly, as discussed further
211 below.

212

213 **Clinical features of Zika virus infection**

214 Historically, ZIKV infection caused a variable clinical syndrome in humans ranging from
215 no signs or symptoms to an influenza-like viral illness that appeared similar in the early stages
216 to those caused by other epidemic arboviruses including DENV and CHIKV. For ZIKV,
217 approximately 20 percent of individuals who become infected progress to a clinically apparent
218 febrile illness, although hospitalization is rare (18, 19). Signs and symptoms associated with
219 ZIKV infection occur on average within 3 to 7 days of mosquito inoculation and include an
220 abrupt onset of fever accompanied by headache, arthralgia, myalgia, conjunctivitis, vomiting,
221 fatigue, and/or maculopapular rash (94) (**Figure 2**). For many years, ZIKV infection was
222 considered self-limiting with no long-term sequelae, but more severe complications have
223 become apparent during the more recent ZIKV outbreaks in the South Pacific and Latin
224 America, possibly because the greater number of infections has facilitated detection and
225 reporting of rare outcomes (though other factors may also contribute to increased ZIKV
226 pathogenesis). Although ZIKV infection has not been reported to cause the plasma leakage and
227 hemorrhage associated with severe DENV disease, ZIKV has caused thrombocytopenia and
228 hematospermia (52, 54, 95). There are no reported fatal cases of ZIKV in otherwise healthy
229 people. However, ZIKV-associated mortality has been described in patients with co-morbidities

230 including sickle cell disease (96), and congenital ZIKV infection and post-ZIKV Guillain-Barré
231 syndrome (GBS) can be fatal.

232 During the 2013-2014 ZIKV outbreak in French Polynesia, neurological disorders were
233 linked to ZIKV infection, as there was an increase in the incidence of GBS, a post-infection
234 autoimmune neuropathy that can result in weakness, paralysis, and death (92, 97-99). A case-
235 control study of the outbreak found that GBS patients were more likely to have evidence of past
236 ZIKV infection compared to controls, with 0.24 cases of GBS per 1,000 ZIKV infections (98).
237 Patients with post-ZIKV GBS had atypically low levels of anti-ganglioside antibodies compared
238 to patients with GBS of other etiologies, suggesting that ZIKV may induce GBS by different
239 mechanisms than other causes (98). Cases of a diffuse demyelinating disorder consistent with
240 GBS that are temporally associated ZIKV infection also have been reported in Brazil, El
241 Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela (75, 92). More studies are needed to understand the
242 linkage between ZIKV infection and GBS, particularly the pathophysiological mechanisms at
243 play. Possible mechanisms include (i) immunopathology due to viral antigen mimicry with a host
244 protein; (ii) virus sequence changes resulting in enhanced tropism for the peripheral nervous
245 system; and (iii) an association with prior or concurrent immune responses to DENV (97-100).

246 Most concerning is the sharp increase in cases of microcephaly in newborns in the
247 Northeastern region of Brazil that is associated with ZIKV infection of pregnant women (101).
248 Several cases of presumed intrauterine ZIKV infection resulted in coarse cerebral calcifications
249 in different brain regions of newborn infants or fetuses *in utero* (76). A recent study of a fetus
250 with microcephaly recovered after elective termination at 32 weeks of gestation also revealed
251 numerous calcifications in the cortical and subcortical regions of the frontal, parietal, and
252 occipital lobes of the cerebral cortex (77). Hydrops fetalis and hydranencephaly were noted in a
253 fetus with microcephaly, which was followed by fetal demise (81). The reported microcephaly
254 cases may represent only the severe end of the spectrum, such that newborns with less severe
255 infection could still have long-term cognitive or functional sequelae (76). Indeed, ocular findings

256 in infants with presumed ZIKV-associated microcephaly were described recently. Approximately
257 30% of children with suspected ZIKV infection *in utero* had evidence of significant retinal and
258 optic nerve abnormalities (102).

259

260 **Pathogenesis of ZIKV infection.**

261 Although no recent ZIKV pathogenesis studies have been performed to explain the
262 possible microcephaly observed in Brazil, experiments in mice that were performed 40 and 60
263 years ago suggest that under certain circumstances ZIKV has a tropism for cells in the brain.
264 The original ZIKV strain (MR 766) was isolated by George Dick and colleagues in 1947 from the
265 brain of a 5 to 6 week-old Swiss mouse after it was inoculated via an intracerebral route with the
266 serum of a febrile sentinel rhesus macaque (9). The same group showed subsequently that
267 passaged ZIKV strains caused signs of central nervous system (CNS) disease including motor
268 weakness and paralysis after intracerebral inoculation in mice of different ages (8). Mice under
269 seven days of age were susceptible to lethal ZIKV infection when inoculated by an
270 intraperitoneal route whereas adult mice were less sensitive (103). In mice, the pathological
271 manifestations of disease were restricted to CNS tissues. Neuronal degeneration and cellular
272 infiltration were observed in regions of the spinal cord and brain with evidence of Cowdry type A
273 inclusion bodies (8), which also are described after neuronal infection by herpesviruses.
274 Evidence of neuronal injury also was observed in the pathological evaluation of a human fetus
275 infected *in utero* with ZIKV. In this case, diffuse astrogliosis and activation of microglia were
276 present, and damage extended to the brain stem and spinal cord with Wallerian degeneration of
277 the descending corticospinal tracts noted (77). Beyond the CNS, no other tissue supported
278 significant ZIKV infection including the kidney, lung, spleen, and liver. In comparison, other
279 animals, including cotton rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, and rhesus monkeys did not develop CNS
280 disease, even after intracerebral inoculation (8). More recent studies using a ZIKV isolate from
281 French Polynesia demonstrated infection of human keratinocytes, dermal fibroblasts, and skin

282 biopsies, consistent with the skin being the initial site of ZIKV replication after mosquito
283 inoculation, similar to WNV and DENV (104-107). Similar to DENV, ZIKV can use DC-SIGN and
284 the TAM receptors Axl and Tyro3 as attachment factors (104). Also similar to other flaviviruses,
285 ZIKV infected human dendritic cells in culture and was restricted by the antiviral effects of type I
286 and type II interferon (104).

287 Some ZIKV strains have one N-linked glycosylation site in their envelope (E) protein
288 (N154), whereas others lack predicted glycosylation sites (108). This pattern contrasts with
289 DENV, which has two N-linked glycosylation sites (N67 and N154), and is similar to the E
290 proteins of more distantly related flaviviruses including WNV and TBEV (N154) (109-111).
291 Although N-linked glycosylation on E is associated with enhanced mosquito transmission and/or
292 increased virulence in mammals for some flaviviruses including WNV, TBEV, and others (112-
293 118), it remains unknown whether differential glycosylation between ZIKV strains determines or
294 even correlates with pathogenicity.

295

296 **Diagnosis of ZIKV infection**

297 Because ZIKV causes a non-specific influenza-like illness without pathognomonic
298 features, it is challenging clinically to distinguish it from other viral illnesses. This is especially
299 true because ZIKV co-circulates and shares mosquito vectors with DENV and CHIKV which
300 present similarly with fever, rash, arthralgia, and myalgia (25, 119). In addition to co-circulation,
301 recent reports have described co-infection of multiple arboviruses including ZIKV and DENV
302 (24).

303 Given the challenges in clinical diagnosis, a laboratory-based diagnosis of ZIKV is the
304 gold standard (120). Beyond direct virus isolation, which can be difficult outside of highly
305 specialized laboratories, the most definitive current diagnostic tool is a RT-PCR-based assay
306 that detects ZIKV RNA and can distinguish it from DENV, CHIKV, and other viral infections
307 (120). Because ZIKV viremia in humans lasts for a short duration of 3 to 5 days (20, 121),

308 serum RT-PCR assays, while highly specific, have low sensitivity rates. Urine and saliva
309 samples may have greater utility for diagnosing ZIKV infection by RT-PCR, as viral RNA is
310 detectable at a higher load and with a longer duration in these body fluids than in serum (57,
311 58). In one study in French Polynesia, 19.2% of tests were positive for ZIKV RNA in saliva while
312 negative in blood. The use of saliva sample increased the rate of molecular detection of ZIKV
313 and was of particular interest in groups (e.g., children and newborns) where blood was difficult
314 to collect (58). Viral detection in urine and saliva is not unique to ZIKV, as DENV RNA has been
315 detected in both fluids, whereas infectious WNV and WNV RNA have been detected in urine
316 (122-124).

317 Serology-based diagnosis of ZIKV infection, which is critical to surveillance,
318 epidemiologic analyses, and acute diagnoses, poses a challenge even to experienced
319 laboratory personnel due to the extensive cross-reactivity of antibodies against related
320 flaviviruses that are derived from natural infection or vaccination (e.g., YFV, DENV, or JEV) (19,
321 20, 120). As an example, ZIKV-infected patients can be positive in an IgM assay for DENV,
322 particularly if ZIKV occurs as a secondary flavivirus infection. Cross-reactivity was observed
323 more frequently with DENV than with YFV, JEV, or WNV, although further studies are needed
324 as small numbers of samples were tested. In comparison, if ZIKV is the first flavivirus
325 encountered, the extent of cross-reactivity is less (20). Anti-ZIKV IgM was detectable as early as
326 3 days after onset of illness with most having it present by day 8. Neutralizing antibody
327 developed as early as 5 days after illness onset but again but may still yield substantial cross-
328 reactivity in the setting of prior flavivirus infection or vaccination. The use of paired acute and
329 convalescent sera and a greater than 4-fold rise in ZIKV antibody titers specifically may
330 increase the accuracy of serological testing.

331 Thus, if ZIKV epidemics occur in populations with DENV or other flavivirus vaccine or
332 natural immunity, extensive cross-reactivity in the IgM and neutralization assays can occur,
333 which could lead to an incorrect diagnosis. This is particularly problematic as ZIKV epidemics

334 spread through Latin America and the Caribbean, where DENV prevalence is high. Ideally, a
335 serological assay that minimizes cross-reactivity of other flaviviruses is needed to increase the
336 specificity of IgM and IgG assays. Based on published studies with related flaviviruses (125-
337 127), the development of diagnostic assays with ZIKV NS1 proteins or ZIKV E proteins and
338 subviral particles encoding mutations in the highly cross-reactive fusion loop in domain II might
339 enhance the specificity of serological tests substantially.

340

341 **Unanswered questions**

342 *In utero transmission and teratogenic effects.* While the introduction of a pathogen into a
343 new environment often brings epidemiological and diagnostic challenges, at the outset of the
344 ZIKV outbreak in Brazil, there was no reason to expect a unique presentation; indeed, Zika
345 fever is typically milder than dengue fever. The association between ZIKV and microcephaly
346 was unexpected, as this presentation has not been associated with flaviviruses, and congenital
347 abnormalities are not characteristic of flavivirus infection. Accumulating evidence indicates a
348 role for maternal ZIKV infection as an explanation for the increase in microcephaly cases in
349 Brazil, although further assessment of reported and historical cases is necessary to determine
350 the magnitude of the increase and the attack rate (68, 70, 71). Many questions remain regarding
351 the mechanisms by which ZIKV might cause congenital defects, including microcephaly. The
352 simplest mechanism would be an inherent ability of ZIKV to cross the placenta, followed by
353 direct infection of nervous tissue in the developing fetus. This mechanism is supported by the
354 detection of ZIKV RNA, complete genomes, antigen, and viral particles in fetal tissues, placenta,
355 and amniotic fluid from pregnancies with microcephaly (74, 76-78, 80, 81, 92), and prior studies
356 in mice suggesting a tropism for central nervous system tissues (8). If ZIKV is neurotropic and
357 neurovirulent in the developing fetus, it seems unlikely to manifest only as microcephaly. While
358 microcephaly may be the most apparent congenital abnormality from ZIKV infection, it remains
359 possible that the virus can cause a spectrum of neurological effects, some of which may not be

360 evident for months or years. The association between ZIKV and microcephaly also could be
361 because of its introduction into a ZIKV-naïve population, or alternatively into a population with
362 unique patterns of flavivirus immunity, with prior immunity to DENV or other flaviviruses
363 modulating ZIKV pathogenesis.

364 As the placenta generally is an effective barrier in preventing microorganisms in the
365 maternal circulation from accessing the developing fetus, it will be important to determine what
366 mechanisms ZIKV uses to circumvent this barrier. For example, can ZIKV infect placental
367 trophoblast cells directly, or does it employ some other method to access the fetal
368 compartment? For other congenital infections, the risk of fetal infection varies at different stages
369 of pregnancy (82, 83), and the most extensively described cases of ZIKV-associated
370 microcephaly have all involved infection during the first trimester (76-78, 80). It will be important
371 to determine the temporal risk of congenital ZIKV infection, in order to make informed
372 recommendations to pregnant women about the risks of exposure to ZIKV (74, 91).

373 A growing body of evidence indicates that ZIKV can cross the placenta, infect the fetus,
374 and damage the developing brain (74, 76-80, 92). However, demonstrating a direct causal role
375 for congenital ZIKV infection in the development of microcephaly will require more extensive
376 clinical and epidemiological studies, many of which are now in progress. The existing data do
377 not demonstrate that ZIKV is sufficient to cause microcephaly, and other factors may potentiate
378 the teratogenic effects of ZIKV, including co-infections, environmental factors, viral strain
379 differences, or host genetics. It is noteworthy that to date, ZIKV-associated microcephaly has
380 been observed only in Brazil, and not in previous outbreaks or in other countries. This may
381 reflect the large number of ZIKV infections in Brazil (>1.5 million estimated) and the timing of the
382 outbreak, with Brazil experiencing the earliest effects. However, if microcephaly remains
383 exclusive to women in Brazil or who were infected with the virus while travelling there, it will be
384 important to consider co-factors that may impact *in utero* infection by ZIKV.

385 *Interactions between ZIKV and DENV.* One of the characteristic features of DENV
386 pathogenesis is that while infection with one serotype provides durable immunity to that same
387 serotype, antibodies to one DENV serotype can exacerbate infection with different serotypes via
388 antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE) (128-130). ADE occurs when cross-reactive non-
389 neutralizing antibodies bind to a heterologous DENV serotype. Antibody-opsonized but non-
390 neutralized virus can infect myeloid cells (e.g., monocytes or macrophages) expressing Fc-
391 gamma receptors at a higher rate, allowing for enhanced infection and yield. Because of this,
392 secondary DENV infections (or primary infections in infants with circulating maternal antibodies)
393 can produce severe disease manifestations, including plasma leakage, hemorrhage, and
394 circulatory collapse. ADE can be demonstrated for many flaviviruses in cell culture, but the
395 phenomenon appears to be biologically relevant only in the context of DENV, possibly due to
396 the degree of antigenic relatedness between different DENV serotypes or because of the unique
397 biology of the DENV NS1 protein (131, 132). Given the relatedness between DENV and ZIKV,
398 and the high cross-reactivity demonstrated in serological assays, ADE between DENV and ZIKV
399 and altered disease pathogenesis warrants further evaluation. Recent outbreaks of ZIKV have
400 been associated with more severe disease than historical ones. While explanations for this
401 include changes in the virus, and an enhanced ability to detect rare presentations in larger
402 outbreaks, one feature that distinguishes the most recent ZIKV outbreaks is that they occurred
403 in regions of DENV hyperendemicity, where multiple strains of DENV co-circulate and most
404 people have been infected previously by one or more DENV serotypes. This raises the
405 possibility that ZIKV infection in DENV immune individuals could result in more severe disease
406 presentations. While the natural history of recent DENV outbreaks has been of ZIKV
407 introduction into regions with high DENV prevalence, as ZIKV becomes endemic in the Western
408 Hemisphere it also will be important to monitor reciprocally how ZIKV immunity impacts DENV
409 pathogenesis. If prior DENV immunity impacts ZIKV pathogenesis, we might expect an even

410 greater burden of ZIKV disease if outbreaks emerge in areas of Southeast Asia where the
411 burden of DENV infection is even greater than in Latin America (90).

412 *Vaccine development.* Successful vaccination programs have reduced the global health
413 burden of many flavivirus infections. More than 500 million doses of vaccine to prevent YFV
414 infection have been administered since its development in 1937, and effective vaccines have
415 blunted the impact of JEV and TBEV. Recently, after decades of study, the first live-attenuated
416 tetravalent DENV vaccine (Dengvaxia®) completed phase III human trials and is being deployed
417 in Brazil, the Philippines, and Mexico.

418 As no ZIKV vaccines have been tested even at the pre-clinical stage, we are likely years
419 away from introduction of a ZIKV vaccine. It is expected that at least some groups with existing
420 flavivirus vaccine platforms (e.g., chimeric live attenuated strains, passaged or genetically
421 engineered live attenuated strains, E protein subunit, subviral particles, inactivated virions, or
422 DNA plasmid) will apply these strategies towards ZIKV vaccine development in an expedited
423 manner. A major question remains as to whether it will be easy or difficult to generate an
424 immunogenic and safe vaccine against ZIKV. The issues related to this question include the
425 following: **(a) Strain diversity.** Given the relatively low variation between ZIKV strains (2, 26,
426 29, 108) (approximately 94% amino acid identity across the viral genome), and lack of existence
427 of different genotypes or serotypes, it is plausible that an effective vaccine against one strain will
428 function broadly against all circulating ZIKV strains; **(b) Effect of pre-existing flavivirus**
429 **immunity on ZIKV vaccine responses.** ZIKV outbreaks are occurring in areas with high
430 seroprevalence rates for DENV infection and vaccination with YFV. Thus, at least some fraction
431 of candidates for ZIKV vaccines will have pre-existing cross-reactive antibodies derived from
432 natural or vaccine-induced flavivirus immunity. This could impact ZIKV responses in one of
433 three ways: (i) boost cross-reactivity immunity, conferring protection against ZIKV; (ii) boost
434 cross-reactive immunity at the expense of generating protective type-specific ZIKV responses

435 (“original antigenic sin”); (iii) neutralize live-attenuated ZIKV without appreciably affecting cross-
436 reactive immunity (sterilizing immunity).

437 *Development of therapeutics.* Given that vaccines against ZIKV may be years away, the
438 development of immediate measures to control or limit ZIKV disease should be a priority. To
439 date, no drug screening studies have been published with ZIKV. Because DENV infections are
440 so frequent worldwide, effort over the past decade has been made in evaluating inhibitors of
441 specific steps in the DENV lifecycle. Such drugs, were they to advance through clinical trial,
442 might have inhibitory activity against other flaviviruses, including ZIKV. Indeed, antiviral drug
443 discovery screens have been performed to identify inhibitors of the fusogenic activity of E
444 protein; the protease and helicase activity of NS3; and the RNA-dependent RNA polymerase
445 and methyltransferase activities of NS5, with further pre-clinical development ongoing (133).
446 Additional strategies being considered are repurposing drug screens including the testing of
447 FDA-approved or well-studied “orphan” drugs against ZIKV infection. Because drugs against
448 flavivirus proteins could select rapidly for resistant variants, the concept of targeting host
449 molecules required for DENV infectivity (134) or viral proteins that require oligomerization (135)
450 has emerged as a possible strategy. Drugs that target steps in flavivirus infection or cell-intrinsic
451 immunity also could be considered. Finally, passive transfer or antibody-based therapeutics
452 against ZIKV as prophylaxis or treatment may be possible, once strongly neutralizing human
453 monoclonal antibodies are isolated, analogous to studies with other flaviviruses (136, 137).
454 Regardless of the approach, one obstacle to developing ZIKV therapeutics is that a key target
455 population would be pregnant women; the design and implementation of trials to test new drugs
456 in pregnant women will be challenging.

457 *Animal models of ZIKV pathogenesis.* Development of vaccines and therapeutics would
458 be expedited by the development of animal models of the different manifestations of ZIKV
459 disease. There are few available data in non-human primates apart from the original isolation of
460 ZIKV from the serum of a febrile rhesus monkey (9) and a recently initiated study to assess

461 ZIKV infection dynamics in three rhesus macaques
462 (<https://dholk.primate.wisc.edu/project/dho/public/Zika/public/ZIKV-001-public/begin.view?>).

463 There also is little available data in mice, as only three papers have reported on ZIKV infection
464 in mice and nothing has been published in almost 40 years (8, 103, 138). Although these
465 studies suggest that ZIKV can replicate and cause injury in cells of the central nervous system,
466 whether this pathogenesis is related or not to the current linkages to GBS or microcephaly
467 remains uncertain and requires further study. A systematic analysis of ZIKV infection and
468 disease through multiple routes (e.g., intradermal, subcutaneous, or intravenous) in different
469 strains of mice at different ages is needed. Such studies might include panels of genetically
470 diverse mice, such as Collaborative Cross mice (139), to identify genetic susceptibility loci that
471 could be related to human disease or to develop infection models for therapeutic and vaccine
472 testing (140, 141). In addition to direct infection of newborn, juvenile, adult, and old mice,
473 studies in which pregnant dams are inoculated with ZIKV and the effects on fecundity, neonatal
474 infection, and brain development are evaluated could address the presumed linkage to
475 microcephaly in humans.

476 *Public Health Considerations.* The association between ZIKV infection and neurological
477 complications such as microcephaly and GBS prompted the World Health Organization on
478 February 1, 2016 to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern surrounding
479 the current ZIKV epidemic in Latin America and the Caribbean (142). The sudden surge of
480 public health, clinical, and basic science interest in ZIKV will increase our understanding of this
481 virus that had remained an obscure viral curiosity until quite recently.

482 Analogous to the introduction of WNV into the United States in 1999 and the arrival of
483 CHIKV in the Caribbean in 2013, the emergence of ZIKV in Brazil represents another example
484 of an arbovirus introduction to the Western Hemisphere with significant impacts on human
485 health and ecology (143). The appearance of new, more severe clinical presentations in recent
486 ZIKV outbreaks also highlights that familiar infections can produce new phenotypes when

487 introduced to new ecological and host systems. The abundance of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in
488 Latin America and the Caribbean suggests that ZIKV may become endemic in the region.
489 Autochthonous transmission also is a possibility in the southern United States, where *Aedes*
490 *aegypti* mosquitos are common, and perhaps farther north where *Aedes albopictus* may serve
491 as a vector. However, the presence of cultural and economic factors such as air conditioning,
492 window screens, indoor lifestyles, and vector control measures, as well as a temperate climate,
493 may prevent widespread ZIKV outbreaks in the United States, much as DENV and CHIKV have
494 not caused epidemics here. Nonetheless, imported cases from travelers are likely to increase in
495 the United States, Europe, and elsewhere (30, 33-35). Indeed, ZIKV infection is now a nationally
496 reportable disease in the United States.

497 The lack of specific antiviral measures to combat ZIKV emphasizes the importance of
498 vector control strategies for combatting arbovirus disease. Such approaches (removing sources
499 of standing water that serve as breeding sites, larvicide and insecticide application, behavioral
500 modifications to avoid mosquito exposure, and possibly the controlled introduction of genetically
501 modified or sterile mosquitoes into an epidemic site) also will protect against DENV, CHIKV, and
502 other mosquito-transmitted diseases (144). The unexpected linkage between ZIKV and
503 microcephaly, and the lack of specific measures to prevent or treat ZIKV in pregnant women, as
504 well as a lack of information to assess the risks posed by ZIKV infection during pregnancy has
505 prompted public health authorities in some countries to issue highly unusual recommendations
506 regarding pregnancy including postponement. In the US, the CDC has recommended enhanced
507 prenatal surveillance of pregnant women who have travelled to areas with ZIKV circulation (74,
508 80, 91). Such recommendations are framed as “abundance of caution” but must be considered
509 in light of the reality of implementation. Access to contraceptives, prenatal care, and safe
510 abortion services should be components of any public health response to ZIKV.

511

512 **Conclusions**

513 ZIKV emergence in the Western Hemisphere has followed what has become a familiar
514 script, in which a previously obscure vector-borne disease is introduced into a new ecological
515 system and host population and then spreads rapidly with significant implications for human
516 health. In the case of ZIKV, this most recent outbreak has been associated with unexpected
517 clinical presentations, and it has been difficult to evaluate the risks and severity of ZIKV infection
518 due to an absence of specific diagnostic reagents and a basic understanding of the molecular
519 virology and pathogenic mechanisms of this virus.
520

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526 **Figure Legends**

527 **Figure 1.** Schematic phylogeny illustrating the genetic relationships between selected
528 flaviviruses that are human pathogens. Dendrogram adapted from (145), based on the amino
529 acid sequence of the complete polyprotein.

530 **Figure 2. ZIKV pathogenesis.** The typical course of ZIKV infection is illustrated (green
531 background), with potential severe effects requiring further investigation indicated (blue
532 background). DENV, dengue virus; ADE, antibody-dependent enhancement.

533

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