

# Health Alert: Zika Testing Urged for Pregnant Women and Symptomatic Individuals in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Information posted April 19, 2017

**Note:** *Texas Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) must provide all medically necessary, Medicaid-covered services to eligible clients. Administrative procedures such as prior authorization, pre-certification, referrals, and claims/encounter data filing may differ from traditional Medicaid (fee-for-service) and from MCO to MCO. Providers should contact the client's specific MCO for details.*

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is modifying Zika Testing Criteria for Residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

- Testing is recommended as part of routine prenatal care for pregnant residents of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties at their first prenatal care visit and again in the second trimester. In addition, if a pregnant woman exhibits symptoms in any stage of her pregnancy, she should be tested (or retested if tested already) for Zika.
- Testing is recommended for other residents of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties who exhibit a rash and at least one other common Zika symptom, either fever, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (eye redness).

Testing is available through many commercial labs and through the public health laboratories in the state.

DSHS anticipated that the southernmost areas of the state would be most likely to support local mosquito transmission of Zika. In response, it expanded the testing threshold for symptomatic pregnant women in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties in October 2016 to quickly diagnose and prevent further spread of the disease. After several cases of local mosquito-borne transmission in Brownsville, the largest city in Cameron County, DSHS recommended, as part of routine prenatal care, testing all pregnant women residing in Brownsville or with travel to Brownsville on or after October 29, 2016.

A mild winter prevented a break in mosquito season in the southernmost areas of the Rio Grande Valley, and Zika virus transmission continues in Northern Mexico. Given the persistent risk, DSHS has further expanded its testing criteria applicable to all residents of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties in order to rapidly identify and respond to new infections and protect the health and well-being of Texans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

## Testing Criteria for Residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley

DSHS is asking the healthcare community to continue to help maximize Zika surveillance for residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, including the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata.

- **Testing is recommended for all pregnant women at their first prenatal care visit and again in the second trimester.** In addition, if a pregnant woman exhibits symptoms at any point in her pregnancy, she should be tested (or retested if tested already) for Zika as soon as possible.
  - Previously, testing was recommended for pregnant women with two of the four most common Zika symptoms, unless the woman lived in or had traveled to Brownsville on or after October 29, 2016. These symptom criteria no longer apply to pregnant women.

- Testing is recommended for other residents of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties who exhibit a rash (especially if itchy and widespread) and at least one other common Zika symptom, either fever, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (eye redness)
  - Previously, testing was recommended for individuals with three of the four most common Zika symptoms, unless they had travel to areas of active Zika transmission
  - Recommended testing criteria for other areas of the state have not changed at this time. See [www.texaszika.org](http://www.texaszika.org) for more information about testing.
- Specimens from clients should be tested using the normal mechanism for obtaining clinical laboratory testing and following the CDC testing algorithm. Many commercial laboratories perform Zika testing; however, for IgM positive tests, additional testing (PRNT) will need to be performed.
  - The ability to pay for testing should not be a barrier to testing, particularly for pregnant women. Testing is available through public health labs for individuals who have no payor source or for whom there is a financial barrier to testing. DSHS is committed to ensuring any pregnant woman at risk for Zika is tested.
  - If the individual is not covered by private insurance or a third party payor, testing may be obtained through a DSHS laboratory. Instructions for how to submit specimens to the DSHS laboratories may be obtained through the TexasZika.org website under the Laboratories [link](#).

DSHS continues to recommend preconception counseling be provided to patients contemplating having a baby. For full women's Zika prevention guidance, visit [texaszika.org/healthcareprof.htm](http://texaszika.org/healthcareprof.htm).

The current comprehensive guidance on Zika testing can be found at [texaszika.org/healthcareprof.htm](http://texaszika.org/healthcareprof.htm).

A CDC tool for use by healthcare providers to pregnant women can be found at [www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/widget.html](http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/widget.html)

DSHS continues to recommend that healthcare providers consult, as needed, with their local health department or DSHS regional office to facilitate appropriate test selection and submission of specimens.

Throughout the upcoming mosquito season, healthcare providers are advised to continue to stay abreast of the status of Zika in Texas and in their local communities.

For Texas-specific information and links to CDC resources, visit [www.texaszika.org](http://www.texaszika.org).

For more information, call the TMHP Contact Center at 1-800-925-9126.