

Study suggests Zika virus won't be passed on through saliva

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Recently published research from UW-Madison suggests the Zika virus is unlikely to be passed through saliva.

This study, published Tuesday in the Nature Communications journal, sheds more light on a virus that has captured the attention of the national media as well as that of the worldwide medical community.

It's been linked to birth defects like microcephaly, a condition where the baby's head is smaller than expected, and can be passed from a pregnant mother to a fetus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Scientists say the Zika virus can be transmitted through mosquito bite, but evidence also exists for the transmission of Zika through intercourse. Once infected, a person's saliva and blood contain the virus for about two weeks, but it stays longer in bodily fluids like breast milk and semen.

The study says the Zika virus is not likely to be passed by kissing or other casual contact like sharing silverware or trying someone's drink.

"If passing the virus by casual contact were easy, I think we would see a lot more of what we would call secondary transmission in a place like the United States," says Tom Friedrich, a virology professor at the UW-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine.

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