



Travel Guard[®] Health Advisory

Zika

The head of the World Health Organization has indicated that the Zika virus is now a global emergency.

The virus is moving rapidly and can be found throughout the Americas - from Argentina to the Southern U.S.

As of August 3, 2016, Zika virus transmission was documented in a total of 68 countries and territories. On January 15, 2016, the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began issuing travel alerts for Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands as a result of an outbreak of the Zika virus. On August 12, 2016, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency in Puerto Rico in response to the Zika outbreak.

On July 29, 2016, health officials in Florida confirmed the first known instance of a Zika virus infection in the U.S. which occurred within the Miami-Dade County. The CDC has claimed that additional Zika cases among travelers visiting or returning to the U.S. will likely increase. The Zika virus is spread by a mosquito, tick or flea.

Zika is a mosquito-borne virus with symptoms that could include rashes, fever, headaches, pain behind the eyes and joint pain. The illness and its symptoms are “usually mild,” according to the CDC, and about one in five people infected will develop symptoms. As a result, Zika often goes undiagnosed and people infected may not seek medical care. Also, the CDC has confirmed test results that show Zika could be sexually transmitted. The CDC is doing more research to provide guidance; especially for the “male sexual partners of women who are or may be pregnant.”

The urgency of this outbreak is not entirely from the severity of symptoms, but from the fact that Zika can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby and has been linked to birth defects, such as, microcephaly—smaller-than-normal head size—in infants.

The virus has been identified in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands and Cape Verde and now in the Americas. On April 26, 2016, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advised travelers, and particularly pregnant women, to consider postponing travel to Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, Fiji, Kosrae, New Caledonia and the Marshall Islands.

Brazil is seen as the epicenter of outbreak in the Americas with over 1.5 million infections. As a result, athletes and tourists in Brazil or planning to travel to Brazil for the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro are being told to continue to monitor the situation.



There is also evidence that Zika virus infections may be followed by a neurological disorder called Guillain-Barre syndrome, which is characterized by ascending paralysis, starting in the feet and legs and rising upwards. In severe cases, the muscles used for breathing become weak and the person has to be placed on a ventilator for respiratory support. In most cases, the person gradually recovers his or her strength over a period of weeks to months, but the recovery may not be complete.

The evidence linking Zika to Guillain-Barre syndrome is not as definitive as that for microcephaly, and the number of cases is not as large. However, this is still a cause for concern. The CDC travel alerts, released since January 15, 2016, urge women who **are** pregnant to consider postponing travel to countries where Zika virus transmission is ongoing (see [Women Who Are Pregnant](#) section on next page for full list of countries).

How to Prevent Zika

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika. Therefore, the CDC advises travelers to protect themselves from mosquito bites by taking the following precautions:

- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use EPA-registered insect repellents as directed.
 - Pregnant and breastfeeding women can use all EPA-registered insect repellents, including DEET, according to the product label.
 - Most repellents, including DEET, can be used on children older than 2 months, according to the product label.
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents. (Clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear can be treated with a pesticide called permethrin to kill or repel insects such as mosquitoes and ticks) You can buy pre-treated clothing and gear or treat them yourself.
- Stay and sleep in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms.

If You Think You May Have Zika

- Please note, there is no specific medical treatment for Zika.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse if you develop a fever with a rash, joint pain or red eyes. Tell him/her about your recent travel.
- Your doctor or healthcare professional may recommend taking medicine, such as acetaminophen or paracetamol, to relieve fever and pain. Do not take aspirin, products containing aspirin, or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen.
- Your doctor or healthcare professional may likely recommend getting plenty of rest and drinking of liquids.

Women Who Are Pregnant

Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing: American Samoa, Anguilla, Antigua, Argentina, Aruba, Barbados, Barbuda, Belize, Brazil, Bolivia, Bonaire, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, French Guiana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Kosrae (Federated States of Micronesia), Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mexico, New Caledonia, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saba, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Suriname, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Venezuela.

Women Who Are Trying to Become Pregnant

- Before you travel, talk to your doctor about the risk of Zika virus infection.
- It is strongly recommended that you follow the steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

With no ecological or epidemiological barriers to halt it, it is likely that Zika virus will continue to spread in the Americas to those countries where the vector mosquito is present – those localities that regularly have dengue and chikungunya outbreaks. AIG Travel will continue to document its progress as it occurs.

References

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC](#)
- [World Health Organization, WHO](#)
- [Australian Government - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)
- [U.S. Public Health Emergency, PHE](#)

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