



PO Box 424
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www.totalhealth.org

Zika Virus - recommendations for travelers

The Zika virus has been spreading rapidly through South and Central America recently and has been a major point of concern for travelers to these areas. The safety of our travelers is our highest priority and we would like to address these concerns and help each traveler take appropriate precautions.

How worried should I be?

For most people Zika is a very mild illness and is only a very small risk. In most cases it should not prevent people from traveling or working in areas with an outbreak. The primary concern is to prevent Zika during pregnancy, so limitations on travel are usually confined to women who are pregnant or who are trying to get pregnant. There is no need to be afraid of Zika as long as you learn the facts, take appropriate precautions and avoid travel if you are in the small group of people at risk.

A few facts about Zika

The Zika virus has been around for a long time, but it only recently made it to South America. It has been moving north since then and will likely reach most or all of both South and North America. The most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain and red irritated eyes. Symptoms usually last several days to a week. Most people have no symptoms at all and those who do have symptoms generally have only mild ones. Severe illness is extremely rare with Zika and it poses very little risk to most people.

The great concern about Zika is a possible link to birth defects. Not all children will be affected if their mother is infected during pregnancy, but the risk of a problem does go up.

Protecting yourself from Zika

Zika is transmitted by the Aedes mosquito which is both very common and widespread. Therefore the best way to prevent infection is to protect yourself from mosquitoes. Zika can also be sexually transmitted. Because of this, we recommend travelers abstain from sexual activity or use a condom for all sexual activity immediately after a trip. Unfortunately we don't know how long someone remains contagious right now.



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For women who are pregnant or who are trying to get pregnant we recommend avoiding travel to places where zika is active. This includes all the Total Health sites.

For men who have traveled to any of our clinics we are currently recommending using abstinence or condoms for the length of your spouse's pregnancy or for 6-12 months if your spouse is not currently pregnant. Many people do not have any symptoms from Zika so these recommendations are for everyone who travels. These time frames will change once we know how long individuals remain contagious.

Recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control are changing as we learn more about this virus. Please check their website every few weeks for updated information. The Centers for Disease Control has an excellent information page online at <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/disease-qa.html>.

What we are doing to help protect you?

- Our partners in each country are working to minimize mosquito exposure in their area.
- Lodging sites have air conditioning and/or screens in windows.
- Educating travelers so they can minimize their exposure to mosquitos.

What should you do to protect yourself?

- First, be educated about the virus by reading this letter and the CDC web site referenced above.
- Protect yourself from mosquitos. The Centers for Disease Control recommends the following (from <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/disease-qa.html>):
 - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
 - Housing should be in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside.
 - Use [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-registered](#) insect repellents. A list of recommended repellants can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you>. All EPA-registered insect repellents are evaluated for safety and effectiveness.
 - Always follow the product label instructions.



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- Re-apply insect repellent as directed.
- Do not spray repellent on the skin under clothing.
- If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent.
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or buy permethrin-treated items.
 - Treated clothing remains protective after multiple washings. See product information to learn how long the protection will last.
 - If treating items yourself, follow the product instructions carefully.
 - Do NOT use permethrin products directly on skin. They are intended to treat clothing.
- Sleep under a mosquito bed net if you are overseas or outside and are not able to protect yourself from mosquito bites.
- Use precautions to prevent sexual transmission after returning from a trip as discussed above.
- When you return, if you develop a Zika like illness (<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/symptoms>) you should contact your local doctor.
- If you plan a pregnancy soon after returning we recommend to you discuss it with your physician first.

Where can I get more information?

- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/disease-qa.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6505e1.htm>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/symptoms>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention>
- <http://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-insect-repellent-right-you>