

Zika Virus Alert



PLANNING A TRIP TO A TROPICAL DESTINATION?

Avoid Mosquito Bites to Avoid the Zika Virus

If you've watched the news recently, you may have seen reports of the rapidly spreading Zika virus. Although this virus has now reached pandemic levels in various countries around the world, to date no infections have originated in the United States.

Even so, because of the rapid spread of the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a travel alert for all US travelers heading to Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and South America. In particular, the CDC urges women who are pregnant, trying to conceive, or think they may be pregnant to avoid travel to these areas.

Why focus on women of childbearing age? Over the past year or so, rates of Zika infections have been on the rise in Brazil. At the same time, a dramatic increase in birth defects has been noted over the past several months in that country. The most notable defect is microcephaly, which refers to a significantly reduced skull and brain size.

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The species of mosquitoes that carry the virus are known to inhabit southern portions of the US. So far, no case of Zika virus from a mosquito bite while in the USA has been found, however. The first case diagnosed in the US was a traveler who became infected and then returned to Texas, as reported by the Harris County Public Health Department.

Unfortunately, this defect has significant consequences for the well-being and future of any infant born with it. While there is incomplete proof that Zika virus has caused such a dramatic increase in microcephaly in recent newborns, the evidence of a connection is quite powerful, which prompted the CDC alert.

To learn more about Zika virus and pregnancy, please visit the [CDC website](#).

How the Virus Is Spread

The only way to contract Zika virus is through a mosquito bite from one of two closely related species of mosquitoes. As a result, your best bet for avoiding the virus if you travel to the American tropics is avoiding mosquito bites through aggressive precautions. Insect repellents and covering yourself with long pants and sleeves top the list of prevention techniques. (See more of the CDC's advice on [how to avoid mosquito bites](#).)

Symptoms of Zika Virus

Zika virus symptoms can include fever, rash, joint pain, conjunctivitis (red eyes), muscle pain, and headache. Approximately 20 percent of those who are infected with the Zika virus will exhibit symptoms, occurring anywhere from two to seven days after being bitten. Usually, the resulting illness is mild, and many individuals do not realize they are infected.

How Do You Know if You Have Zika Virus?

If you develop any of the symptoms listed and you've recently been to an area where Zika is present, please see your healthcare provider. A blood test may be ordered to check for Zika or other similar viruses.

Treatment for the Virus

No vaccine exists for Zika virus, and treatment consists of managing symptoms. If you have the virus, be sure to get plenty of rest, keep up with fluids to prevent dehydration, and use acetaminophen for fever and pain. Do not take aspirin or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

Remember that when your infection is active, you can infect those around you if you are bitten by a mosquito that then bites someone else. Therefore, you should make every effort not to be bitten by mosquitoes while you are infected.

For More Information

Please click to see a [map](#) that shows where Zika virus is active.

