



ZIKA VIRUS – SHOULD WE PANIC?

The Zika virus may be a major concern for many travelers going to areas where the virus is spreading rapidly. These areas include all of Central America. Hence, it's important to be well informed on this virus to avoid panicking, and to take preventive actions during a mission trip.

Although the Zika virus has been around for decades in Africa and Asia, the reason that it has become so alarming in 2016 is that a new strand of the virus is apparently linked to birth defects, which in the past hadn't been detected. Seemingly, Zika's new environment is the culprit for this new strand of the virus, which is correlated to birth defects in Brazil.

The news repetitively broadcast the outbreaks in the Americas, and potential new health problems that doctors fear may be related to the Zika virus. But, while it's true that the virus is real, and most likely it will spread in the near future, there is no need to panic. Zika is manageable, and just one of the many other risks that we face in the world. Thus, while it's important to be prepared, it's also important to be educated on the facts and not fall victim to the fear and many myths surrounding the virus.

A FEW IMPORTANT FACTS

Please read this [CDC Zika virus disease Q&A](#) to get answers for questions such as:

- What are the symptoms of Zika?
- How is it transmitted?
- Who is at risk of being infected?
- What can people do to prevent becoming infected with Zika?
- What is the treatment for Zika?
- What is [Guillain-Barré syndrome](#) and is it caused by the Zika virus?

An outbreak is considered a public health disease that is rapidly transmitted without notice, which in this case involves pesky mosquitoes.



Nevertheless, unlike Ebola, the Zika virus is not transmitted through passive contact. Hence the best way to avoid panicking about the possible consequences is to focus on prevention.

The main risk is for pregnant women due to the Zika virus' association to birth defects in Brazil. Therefore, we strongly recommend for missionaries who are pregnant to take seriously the recommendations from the WHO and CDC to not travel to one of the 20 countries in the Americas experiencing the virus.

The countries where the outbreak of Zika virus is happening are taking severe measures through:

- Intense fumigation in mosquito-breeding areas and densely populated neighborhoods to eradicate the mosquitoes.
- Education efforts in communities to limit large-scale breeding grounds like water and puddles, and on how to prevent getting bitten by mosquitoes.

STEPS TO PREVENT GETTING INFECTED

For all other missionaries traveling to Central America, we recommend to bring repellent that contains 20% or more DEET (diethyltoluamide, which is the most common active ingredient in insect repellents) for protection that lasts up to several hours. Products containing DEET include Off, Cutter, Sawyer, and Ultrathon.

Other protection products against mosquitoes include:

- Picaridin (also known as KBR 3023, Bayrepel, and icaridin. Products containing picaridin include Cutter Advanced, Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus, and Autan [outside the US])
- Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or PMD (Products containing OLE include Repel and Off! Botanicals)
- IR3535 (Products containing IR3535 include Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus Expedition and SkinSmart)



If you are interested in reading more about repellents, its use, please read [what is the best way to keep mosquitoes from biting.](#)

In addition to using repellents, other ways to prevent mosquito bites is for missionaries to:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats.
- Wear closed shoes and avoid wearing sandals at all times.
- Remain in air-conditioned rooms or enclosed areas with screened windows after they return from their work sites.

To better protect soldiers from the risk and annoyance of biting insects, the U.S. and British armies are treating all new uniforms with permethrin.

Thus, you can also treat your clothing, such as socks, with permethrin, usually this is only necessary for people who will be in mosquito-ridden areas, such as swamps, rivers, lakes, or anywhere that might have a high concentration of standing water. This [youtube video](#) shows how to treat civilian clothing with permethrin spray.

PREVENTIVE STEPS THAT GCLA IS TAKING

We have designated Frank Castillo, GCLA's Central America onsite U.S. missionary liaison, to initiate and carry out the in-country prevention plans for US missionaries from getting infected with the Zika virus.

Such prevention plans include:

- Making sure that all leaders of GCLA mission sites are well informed about the Zika virus and how to prevent it.
- Avoiding work sites with a high exposure to mosquitoes.
- Making sure that missionaries' lodging sites have air conditioning and/or screens on windows.
- Reminding missionaries to apply mosquito repellent every several hours and to take other preventive actions that are detailed above



CLOSING THOUGHTS

Our world is too interconnected, travel is easier now, and mosquitoes too airborne to believe that we can keep this at bay. But that is no reason to panic. Let's be mindful that for non-pregnant people, Zika is often asymptomatic, and if infected by the Zika virus, the symptoms are mainly rashes, redness of the eyes, joint pain, and/or fever. Eighty percent of those affected never know they have the disease. In fact, once people get it, typically they become immune because their bodies develop antibodies against the virus.

Since South America and Central America have never had the virus before, the population in these countries hasn't developed immunity against it; this being one of the main reasons that it has spread so rapidly there. In addition, the virus has spread more rapidly in densely populated underprivileged areas, with no running water, no air conditioning, and nearby standing water. The most affected communities have had little training on how to prevent mosquito bites and on how to limit mosquito-breeding grounds. Plus, the availability of mosquito repellents and nets is very limited in many of the highly affected zones.

Recently, Brazilian scientists found the Zika virus in the urine and saliva of infected people, which may imply that besides spreading through mosquito bites; it may be transmitted through bodily fluids. Nevertheless, as Paulo Gadelha, the head of Brazil's Fiocruz Institute, a department of Brazil's Ministry Health, stated "But that does not mean there is a capacity for transmission through saliva and urine". Oswaldo Cruz, also of the Fiocruz, added " It means the virus is active, capable of infecting a cell so this is completely different, it means the virus is functional."

If you have additional questions feel free to contact the GCLA missions staff

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