



HEALTH & WELLNESS Jul 28, 2016

Traveling to the Olympics or a Zika Country? Read This.



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Updated July 29th. Florida governor Rick Scott has just confirmed the first cases of locally transmitted Zika in Downtown Miami.

As athletes, reporters, and spectators begin to arrive in Rio for the 2016 Summer Olympics, Zika, as well as a surplus of other issues, continues to dominate headlines. And while key information is still missing about the virus, the CDC and many governments are concerned because of its connection to microcephaly, easy transmission, and lack of vaccine.

So, here's all the info you need if you're traveling to the Olympics, or any other destination with active Zika transmission.

What Is Known

- There is no vaccine.
- The virus is spread by the Aedes mosquito, which bites during the day.
- There is a known link to microcephaly in children born from a mother who had or has Zika.
- Only 1 in 5 patients who contract the virus experience symptoms.
- Symptoms can last from several days to a week.
- The CDC has issued a Level 2-Practice Enhanced Precautions travel alert.
- The disease can be sexually transmitted.
- There are 1,400 Zika cases reported in travelers from 46 U.S. states.
- View the full list of countries with active transmission.

Should You Still Go?

Dr. Devon Davis, MD and Associate Director of Medical Operations for Global Rescue, recommends that pregnant women do not travel to any Zika countries; if you must it's imperative to follow prevention tips and get good prenatal care, including testing even if you don't have any symptoms once you return.

Women and their partners who are considering becoming pregnant within the next few months should also reconsider travel. Debora Rocha, Regional Security Manager for International SOS and Control Risks in Brazil, and Dr. Gary Mazer, Director of Emergency Management and Employee Health Services at CityMD, suggest waiting at least eight weeks before trying to become pregnant after visiting a Zika country.

Prevention Tips

- Use insect repellent that contains DEET, Picardin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus, or para-methane-diol.
- Apply sunscreen first, then bug spray.
- Remove standing water in and around your hotel room.
- Only stay in a room that uses air conditioning, screens, and mosquito netting.
- Wear light colored long sleeves, long pants, and/or permethrin-treated clothing if possible.
- Practice safe sex.

Tips provided by Dr. Devon Davis, MD, Dr. Joe Alton, MD, Dr. Gary Mazer, and IAMAT (International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers)

Symptoms

Dr. Joe Alton, MD, and author of the recently published "The Zika Virus Handbook" explains Zika's symptoms:

- Fever
- Rashes
- Joint and muscle pain
- Conjunctives

It's important to note that these symptoms are very similar to Dengue and Chikungunya, and require testing to diagnose.

Travel Insurance

If traveling to a Zika-infected country, you should consider purchasing travel insurance to cover both the costs of potential medical attention abroad and trip cancellation.

Most primary health insurances will not cover medical attention while abroad. Consider investing in emergency travel medical insurance in case you do need assistance. Most of these plans work by reimbursement, so make sure to keep receipts and all documents once you are discharged or after your doctor's visit.

Some airline, cruise, and tour operator companies are allowing some travelers, particularly pregnant women, to cancel or postpone their trip, so make sure to call them first if you are reconsidering your travel. If not, look into "Cancel for Any Reason" or CFAR travel insurance—this is the only way your trip will be either partially or fully covered if canceling for Zika-related reasons, as it is not typically covered under standard travel cancellation policies.

Brazil and the Olympics

Right now is the winter season for Brazil, which means fewer mosquitos overall, and a positive for travelers and athletes. And fortunately for those headed to Rio, the risk for contracting the Zika virus at the Olympics right now is 15 times lower than the chances of someone catching Dengue during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, according to Dr. Davis.

However, Zika, Dengue, and Chikungunya, which are all transmitted by the Aedes mosquito, are all circulating Rio, so if you do experience certain symptoms know that it might not be Zika.

After You Return Home

Even if you don't have any symptoms once you are back in the U.S., continue taking precautions. Dr. Davis recommends taking extra steps to avoid mosquito bites for up to three weeks so Zika doesn't spread to other mosquitos since they can get the virus from human blood if they bite you.

Additionally, you should practice safe sex for up to eight weeks after traveling to a Zika country. If you're a male who is experiencing symptoms you should have protected sex for six months. And, male partners of pregnant women should also use protection or abstain until the pregnancy is over, recommends Dr. Mazer, Dr. Davis, and Rocha.

Dr. Alton recommends consulting with your doctor whether testing is necessary once you return with or without symptoms. A Zika diagnosis can be confirmed with a blood or urine test.

Editor's Note: The CDC suggests that travelers who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant consider delaying travel to areas where the Zika virus is spreading. All travelers going to affected areas should consult with a doctor before departure, and should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites while traveling.