

CDC issues travel alert for pregnant women due to Zika virus

January 16, 2016

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Article type: [News](#)

Topics: [Birth Defects](#), [Fetus/Newborn Infant](#), [Infectious Diseases](#), [Zika](#)

Pregnant women should consider delaying travel to areas where the Zika virus is spreading due to a possible link to **microcephaly**, health officials warned.

The regions in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) **Level 2 travel alert** include Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Venezuela, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

While transmission has not been reported in the continental U.S., travelers returning to the country have been found to be infected.

Zika virus primarily is spread by Aedes mosquitoes and typically produces mild illness. However, health authorities including the CDC and Pan American Health Organization are investigating a possible association between Zika virus in pregnant women in Brazil and the birth defect microcephaly in their babies. Since October 2015, Brazil has recorded more than 3,500 cases of microcephaly, a condition in which a baby's head is smaller than average.

As these studies continue, pregnant women should consider postponing travel to affected regions "out of an abundance of caution," the CDC said in a news release. Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant should consult with their doctor if they do choose to travel and take precautions to **avoid mosquito bites** by using repellent with DEET, picaridin or IR3535. In addition, travelers should wear long sleeves and pants, preferably treated with permethrin, and stay in places with air conditioning or window screens.



H. Cody Meissner, M.D., FAAP, ex officio member of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases and associate editor of the AAP *Visual Red Book*, called the CDC guidance "a reasonable recommendation at this time until we know a little bit more."

There currently are no vaccines to protect against Zika virus but the CDC said health officials are working to develop them.

“I think the area that pediatricians should focus on is protection against mosquitoes especially if (patients) go to an endemic area,” Dr. Meissner said.

Zika is a Flavivirus like West Nile and yellow fever and can be tough to diagnose. Roughly one in five people will develop symptoms that may include fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis. Some people also may experience headache, muscle pain or vomiting.

The **CDC recommends** that pediatricians consider the possibility of Zika virus in patients who present with those symptoms and recently have traveled to an endemic area. They should report suspected cases to state health departments in order to perform diagnostic testing. Fetuses and infants of women who contracted the virus during pregnancy should be tested for possible neurologic abnormalities and congenital infection.

There are no antiviral treatments for Zika virus. Symptoms can be treated with rest, fluids, antipyretics and analgesics but avoid aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, according to the CDC.

If any person is found to have Zika, they should be kept away from mosquitoes as the virus can be transmitted to the mosquito which then can infect another person.

General information about the Zika virus can be found at, <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/>.

Information for health care providers can be accessed at, <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/hc-providers/index.html>.

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