Zika virus travel warning

Zika is transmitted by the Aedes mosquitoes that bite mostly during the daytime

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Zika virus is a Flavivirus that causes Zika Fever. There are other types of Flavivirus such as Dengue Virus, Yellow Fever Virus and West Nile Virus. The major cause of transmission is via the Aedes mosquito that stings during the day, although exceptionally people can also become infected through sexual contact and blood transfusions. Pregnant women can transmit the virus to their unborn child.

In 2014 an epidemic occurred in South and Central America, although the virus can also appear to a lesser extent in Asia, Africa and Oceania. During the epidemic it was discovered that the disease could cause miscarriages and congenital defects if the mother became infected with the Zika virus during pregnancy. The congenital defects included microcephaly (skull smaller than normal), epilepsy, growth deficiencies, joint defects, and visual and hearing impairments.

Pregnant women are advised not to travel to countries where the Zika virus is found (according to the WHO list categories 1 and 2 - the list is periodically updated):

Country list zika

Pregnant women and their partners and couples wishing to conceive who travel to areas where the Zika virus is present are advised to protect themselves against mosquito bites during the day. They can be tested to find out if they have, or have had, the Zika virus. If you are ill (or have been ill), it is advisable to have this done as soon as possible. If you are not ill, it is best to wait 3 weeks following your return before undergoing tests - this will show the highest probability or otherwise of being infected. For further information you can contact your GP, or the infectious diseases department at a hospital, or a travel clinic. If there is an ‘urgent’ desire to conceive and you have not been tested, it is recommended that men wait at least 6 months and women at least 2 months after returning before planning conception.

For all travellers it is recommended to take proper protection against mosquito’s bites in the daytime. The symptoms usually include mild flu-like complaints, skin irritation and red eyes, and in exceptional cases it can cause neurological complications such as paralysis (Guillain-Barré). It is of little use and therefore not recommended to test people who are either not pregnant or who have no urgent desire to conceive.

No vaccines or specific treatment for infection by the Zika virus is available.

If after reading this article and reading the FAQ you would like to have further information, it is advisable to make an appointment for a consultation.