Travel Alert: Zika Virus

Updated December 2017

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a Travel Alert (Level 2-Practice Enhanced Precautions) for transmission of Zika virus, a mosquito-borne illness. This alert affects people traveling to countries in Central America, South America, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. The virus continues to be actively transmitted and the affected geographic area is changing often. Please visit here for the CDC’s map of active locations.

Who’s at risk?: Anyone who is living in or traveling to an area where Zika virus is found who has not already been infected with Zika virus is at risk for infection. Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant are encouraged to postpone travel to these areas. The Zika virus is suspected of causing birth defects including microcephaly, which causes underdevelopment of the head and brain.

For those who do travel to or reside in affected areas, sexual transmission of Zika virus appears rare at present. A very cautious approach would be for male condom use for 1-2 months after risk travel with no compatible symptoms, for 6 months following recovery from laboratory confirmed infection, and for the duration of pregnancy when the female partner is pregnant. Symptomatic travelers should ideally abstain from sex pending test results and seek expert advice if Zika infection is proven. Current understanding is that, if infected, Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week. The virus will not cause infection in a baby that is conceived after the virus is cleared from the blood. A cautious approach would be to delay pregnancy for 1-2 months after risk travel.

Prevention: Mosquito precautions are good practice regardless of where you are traveling. However, there is no vaccine to prevent Zika at this time, so those traveling to Zika affected areas should follow enhanced precautions to prevent mosquito bites. Precautionary measures include: wearing long sleeves and pants to cover skin, using insect repellent containing 30% DEET, wearing permethrin-treated clothing and sleeping in screened-in rooms.

Before you travel: Zika virus should be addressed at your pre-departure medical appointment. Please speak to your healthcare provider if you have any concerns regarding pregnancy and the risks of Zika.

For further education regarding Zika virus, please visit the following link: http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html

The Office of Global Studies will continue to monitor the situation and communicate further updates as needed. Contact us with any questions.