

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAVELERS TO ZIKA ENDEMIC COUNTRIES

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Zika virus has blossomed from an obscure etiology of fever and rash in Africa and Southeast Asia to an emerging pathogen of global concern. After the confirmation of Zika virus in Brazil in 2015, it has spread rapidly through Latin America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and parts of Florida and Texas in the United States. Several Southeast Asian and sub-Saharan countries have also reported its circulation -- and outbreaks in the case of Singapore. Despite being typically a mild or subclinical illness, Zika virus infection in pregnant women leads to deleterious effects including fetal demise and the congenital Zika syndrome; Guillain-Barré syndrome and other neurological sequelae are also recognized. Transmission via sexual contact and blood products have also been documented.

Recommendations pre-travel for travelers to countries with Zika virus transmission have evolved. Health authorities recommend that travelers use anti-vector measures when traveling to regions with Zika virus transmission. Most authorities recommend that pregnant women avoid travel to areas that are reporting outbreaks of Zika virus. However, risk categories and risk definitions vary among the health authorities. Some authorities have revised their risk categorization.

Testing capabilities differ between countries and often depends on the region within each country. As a result, testing/screening and evaluation for Zika virus infection have changed over the course of the Zika outbreaks. Post-travel advice regarding testing/screening for Zika may also vary depending on the availability and recommendations of local health authorities.

The objectives of this presentation are: 1) to describe some guidelines from different health authorities and illustrate how they evolved over time; 2) to review guidelines with particular focus on travelers to low-burden areas such as Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia; 3) to discuss pre-conception recommendations for couples planning pregnancy after travel; and 4) to summarize detailed recommendation on travel and screening for pregnant travelers.