

ADVISORY CONCERNING THE ZIKA VIRUS

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On January 15, 2016, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a travel alert to highlight countries where the Zika virus is prevalent. This alert pertains to countries in South and Central America where KSU has education abroad programs. This alert recommends that travelers practice enhanced precautions related to travel in these areas, but it does not advise against traveling to these locations except in cases of pregnant women or women planning to get pregnant.

The Zika virus is spread by the Aedes mosquito and is therefore most prevalent in tropical environments – however, the Aedes mosquito is also endemic to the United States. Generally, symptoms of the Zika virus are mild and include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes), lasting several days to a week. Currently there is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika, but severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon.

However, Zika has been linked to Guillain-Barre syndrome and to a specific birth defect called microcephaly. This link strong enough that the CDC issued travel guidance for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant, warning them to avoid visiting places where the virus is currently circulating. Such travelers should regularly review the travel alert for updates as more countries are likely to be added to the list. (www.cdc.gov)

The Aedes mosquito is an aggressive daytime biter, prefers to bite people, and lives indoors and outdoors near people. Travelers can limit their exposure to Zika (and other mosquito-borne illnesses like Malaria, Dengue Fever and Chikungunya) by taking precautions to prevent mosquito bites (See below).

If you are concerned about a risk of exposure to Zika related to upcoming travel, contact a medical specialist. Pregnant women, or women planning to become pregnant, should consult with their OB/GYN. Feel free to contact the KSU Department of Global Operations for further information at 470/578-2668.

Facts about the Zika Virus

- Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on a person already infected by the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites.

- A mother already infected with the Zika virus near the time of delivery can pass the virus to her newborn around the time of birth, but this is rare.
- It is possible that the virus could be passed from mother to fetus during pregnancy. This mode is currently being investigated.
- To date, there are no reports of infants getting the virus through breastfeeding.
- There has been one report of possible spread through a blood transfusion and one report of possible spread through sexual contact.

Prevention

- Use insect repellants
 - When used as directed, insect repellants are safe and effective for everyone, including pregnant and nursing women.
 - Repellants containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-methane-diol products provide long-lasting protection.
 - If you use both sunscreen and repellent, apply the sunscreen first.
 - Do not spray insect repellent on skin under clothing.
 - Treat clothing with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated clothing.
 - Always follow the label instructions.
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use air conditioning or window/door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. Sleep under a mosquito bed net.
- Empty containers of standing water to reduce the number of mosquitoes.