

**Frequently Asked Questions
Regarding Zika Virus
February 19, 2016**

What are the Zika virus infection symptoms?

The disease is usually mild with symptoms lasting from days to a week. According to the Puerto Rico Department of Health, in general, the symptoms begin 3-7 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Common symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain or pink eye. Other symptoms include muscle pain, headache, pain behind the eyes and vomiting. Only blood tests can confirm if it is indeed the Zika virus. According to the CDC, recently, the Ministry of Health in Brazil has raised concerns about a possible association between the Zika virus outbreak and increased numbers of babies born with birth defects. For this reason, pregnant women should take extra precautions to avoid mosquito bites. Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon. Serious illness is not common. Deaths from the disease are rare.

What do you know about the Zika being spread through sexual transmission?

It was reported that in Texas Zika was transmitted sexually and both parties recovered. More information can be found [here](#).

What do you know about the Zika being spread through blood transfusions?

The Red Cross are asking travelers to Zika outbreak countries to wait at least 28 days before donating blood.

What can travelers do to prevent Zika virus infection?

There is currently no vaccine or medicine to prevent Zika virus infection. Travelers can protect themselves by preventing mosquito bites and wearing appropriate clothing when enjoying the outdoors. If staying at a hotel or small inn it is also recommended that you do not leave your balcony doors open throughout the night.

How to prevent mosquito bites:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats.
- Use an appropriate insect repellent as directed.
- Higher percentages of active ingredient provide longer protection. Use products with the following active ingredients:
 - [DEET](#) (Products containing DEET include Off!, Cutter, Sawyer, and Ultrathon)

- **Picaridin** (also known as KBR 3023, Bayrepel, and icaridin products containing picaridin include Cutter Advanced, Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus, and Autan (outside the US))
 - **Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE)** or **PMD** (Products containing OLE include Repel and Off! Botanicals)
 - **IR3535** (Products containing IR3535 include Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus Expedition and SkinSmart)
- Stay and sleep in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms.
 - The CDC has also posted an Infographic with easy-to-read information regarding traveling when pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant: <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pdfs/zikapregnancyinfographic.pdf>
 - These have been the recommendations from the CDC, The Caribbean Public Health Agency, in collaboration with the Caribbean Tourism Organization and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA).

Is it safe for meeting attendees/tourists to travel to Puerto Rico?

- The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia has issued a travel [alert](#) to Puerto Rico, advising people traveling to Puerto Rico to practice enhanced precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites to reduce their risk of infection with Zika virus. Special Interim recommendations have been identified by the CDC for pregnant women – please see below.
- The Government of Puerto Rico decided to declare a public health state of emergency on the Island. Thus, providing Puerto Rico access to federal emergency funds to combat the spread of the Zika virus and protect the health of all citizens and visitors.
- The government’s determination to declare a public health state of emergency was not taken lightly or precipitously. Before this decision, a governmental interagency committee, which includes the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and representatives from the private sector, was created to coordinate efforts to educate the public on prevention, and safeguard the health of residents and visitors on the Island.
- In summary, Puerto Rico is a secure and prepared destination and is working very proactively and aggressively with the Zika virus.

Is it safe for pregnant women to travel to Puerto Rico?

- The CDC has provided the following interim recommendations for pregnant travelers: [Interim Recommendations](#)

Zika virus can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called [microcephaly](#) and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. Knowledge of the link between Zika and these outcomes is evolving, but until more is known, CDC recommends special precautions for the following groups:

- Women who are pregnant (in any trimester):
 - Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
 - If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your doctor first and strictly follow [steps to prevent mosquito bites](#) during your trip.
- Women who are trying to become pregnant:
 - Before you travel, talk to your doctor about your plans to become pregnant and the risk of Zika virus infection.
 - Strictly follow [steps to prevent mosquito bites](#) during your trip.

Specific areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are often difficult to determine and are likely to change over time. As more information becomes available, this travel notice will be updated. Please check back frequently for the most up-to-date recommendations. Travelers can also consult [PAHO](#) for a list of Latin American countries with ongoing transmission.

- [The Puerto Rico Department of Health](#) has issued a statement assuring the public it has taken all the necessary measures to keep monitoring the situation and prevent an outbreak. Furthermore, the Health Department organized a plenary session in early February for health professionals of the island to provide details on everything related to the Zika virus. From the identification and management of clinical cases to the control and the prevention measures used to eradicate the mosquito population.
- As always, all emergency services are available and prepared to deal with any situation or emergency including hospital facilities, fire department, police and ambulances.
- Medical supplies and treatment are readily available in Puerto Rico for any more confirmed cases that may arise.

Does Zika virus infection cause Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)?

At this time, the CDC states, “We do not know if Zika virus infection causes GBS. It is difficult to determine if any particular pathogen “caused” GBS. The Brazil Ministry of Health is reporting an increased number of people affected with GBS. CDC is working to determine if Zika and GBS are related.”

Is Puerto Rico still accessible for meeting attendees/tourists?

- Yes, Puerto Rico’s many attractions, resort areas and tourist services have not been affected by this situation. Services relevant to tourists are available including:

- Taxis
 - Casinos
 - National Parks
 - Airport Staff and Maintenance
 - Tour Guides
 - Municipal Services
 - Tourist Information Centers
 - Emergency Services (hospital facilities, fire department, police)
- Meet Puerto Rico is constantly monitoring the situation and in constant communication with the Department of Health.
 - Puerto Rico is a secure and prepared destination and is working proactively and aggressively with the Zika virus.

What is Puerto Rico doing to control the mosquito population?

The government of Puerto Rico has ordered increase prevention, control, guidance, inspection and surveillance efforts from all agencies in order to protect the public health of all of its citizens and visitors. Prevention and control relies on reducing the breeding of mosquitoes through source reduction (removal and modification of breeding sites) and reducing contact between mosquitoes and people. This can be achieved by reducing the number of natural and artificial water-filled habitats that support mosquito larvae, reducing the adult mosquito populations around at-risk communities and by using barriers such as insect screens, closed doors and windows, long clothing and repellents.

The on-going efforts include an educational/awareness component which comprises information material and seminars, online resources, social media, press conferences and official periodic reports on Zika cases and any new developments regarding the transmission, symptoms and effects of the disease.

The government has activated a 24-hour hotline (3-1-1) where the citizens of Puerto Rico can call to report of any standing water pools that need to be treated by local agencies. Aside from that, the Governor and all the health officials are urging the citizens of Puerto Rico to contribute in the fight against the proliferation of mosquitoes. The Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board has opened five gathering centers of used tires.

In conjunction, municipalities such as Fajardo, San Juan and Carolina, among others, are supporting the Government's official plan of action with the revision and fumigation of public facilities and areas in the various sectors of the city, as well as municipal cemeteries.

The prevention and awareness have helped keep the number of confirmed cases on the Island relatively low.

What are the hotels doing to control the mosquito population?

The Caribbean Public Health Agency, in collaboration with the Caribbean Tourism Organization and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), has issued [guidelines for hotels and guesthouses](#) in the Caribbean to help prevent and prepare for the Zika virus. Please contact your individual hotel for the status of their preparation.

Is the current situation a concern for travelers to Puerto Rico?

- The Government of Puerto Rico, The Department of Health, The Puerto Rico Tourism Company and our industry partners are taking all necessary measures to enable travelers to enjoy their visit to our island.
- The CDC has issued a [travel alert](#) advising people traveling to Puerto Rico to take usual precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites to reduce their risk of infection with Zika virus. Special recommendations for pregnant travelers are also listed.
- The Puerto Rico Department of Health, <http://www.salud.gov.pr/Pages/Home.aspx>, has provided updates on the current situation and helpful tips. This site is in Spanish.
- All ports, airports and taxi services continue to run as usual. All casinos, visitor centers and beaches and parks will remain open for visitors.
- We urge travelers to keep informed and check updated information on the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Puerto Rico Tourism Company will post any alerts regarding travel to Puerto Rico on its website www.seepuertorico.com .

What is the potential impact on meetings as a result of this issue?

- Meet Puerto Rico will remain in constant communication with our tourism partners and the Puerto Rico Department of Health. We will continue to monitor any travel advisories issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and work with our partners to take appropriate measures to minimize the potential effects of Zika virus on travel to the island.

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