



## POSITION STATEMENT

### ZIKA VIRUS

In recent months, there has been increasing concern about the mosquito-transmitted Zika virus spreading through several Latin American countries. The World Health Organization has declared the virus and its suspected link to major birth defects an *international public health emergency*.

An outbreak of the Zika virus, which is transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes and possibly by other means, was detected in Brazil in May and has since moved into more than 20 countries in Latin America, including countries Kids Alive serves. For healthy, non-pregnant travelers, the infection causes only mild symptoms and leads to no lasting harm. However, the main concern is over the virus's possible link to microcephaly, a condition that causes babies of infected mothers to be born with unusually small heads and, in the vast majority of cases, damaged brains.

Kids Alive International, recognizing the ongoing and growing concern about the Zika virus and its risk to pregnant women, is committed to keeping our staff, service teams, and donors apprised of any developments. We want to ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to reduce risks to those we serve, and that those who serve with us are adequately informed and properly protected.

**We strongly advise women who are pregnant, who suspect they might be pregnant, or who are trying to become pregnant *not to travel to our sites in countries where Zika is present (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Peru, and Guatemala)*.** Teams planning service trips to our sites in Peru, where cases of Zika have only recently been reported in small numbers, should remain alert for changes in its status and, like all travelers, should follow the medical advice of their healthcare providers.

Travelers who are able to conceive should refrain from intercourse or use protection for two months or more following return from affected areas, even if they are not showing any symptoms. This includes women in-country who are not pregnant but could be a carrier when returning home, as well as husbands returning from Latin America. If it's determined that Zika is present in your bloodstream, protection should be used for six months or more.

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) has issued an Alert Level 2, Practice Enhanced Precautions for countries with known cases. Level 2 does not include a warning against travel, but is an advisory to take sensible precautions such as being vigilant with mosquito repellents. *It does recommend that pregnant women postpone their travel.*

Several of our Latin American sites, such as Oasis in Guatemala, are situated at elevations where mosquitos are not normally present, *but we urge all teams and other visitors to come equipped with a strong mosquito repellent and to use it diligently when outdoors*, especially during the hours near sunrise and sunset.

## A few facts regarding the Zika virus:

- Approximately 1 in 5 people infected with Zika virus become ill (i.e., develop Zika).
- The incubation period (time from exposure to onset of symptoms) is unknown, but most likely a few days to a week.
- Most common symptoms of Zika are:
  - Fever
  - Rash
  - Joint pain
  - Conjunctivitis (red eyes)
  - Muscle pain
  - Headache
- Illness is self-limiting and usually lasts less than a week with no lasting harm.
- The CDC does not recommend antiviral medication for people infected with the Zika virus as the symptoms are mild, if they appear at all, and generally require only rest, nourishment, and other supportive care.
- Zika virus can remain in the blood of an infected person for a few weeks but can be found longer in some people.
- Zika virus may last longer in semen than in the bloodstream.
- The CDC states that as the virus is only present in the blood for a short time, there is no risk for women (or their babies) who become pregnant once the virus leaves the bloodstream – within a few days to a few weeks following exposure.
- Severe illness requiring hospitalization is uncommon. With rare exception, the virus does not appear to linger in the body, and those who recover from the infection are immune.
- Recommended insect repellents include:
  - DEET (Off!, Cutter, Sawyer, Ultrathon)
  - Picardin (Bayrepel, Icaridin, Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus)
  - Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or Para-menthane-diol (PMD)
  - IR3535 (Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus Expedition, Skin Smart, Repel)
  - Permethrin spray for clothing, hats, shoes, bedding

For more information about Zika and its prevention, see:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention/index.html>

For further information on travel advisories, see:

- <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/zika-virus-central-america>

**You should always follow the medical advice of your healthcare provider, particularly if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, when considering travel to a Zika-affected country (including the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Peru, and Guatemala).**