

March 21, 2016

Dear Educator,

As the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health and the State Health Officer, I am writing to share my concerns about Zika virus infection. I am asking you to help disseminate important information to state colleges and universities about protecting against mosquito bites and preventing the spread of Zika virus in Georgia.

Many popular spring break destinations throughout the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Pacific Islands, and Mexico have outbreaks of Zika virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued [Zika travel notices](#) with recommendations for travelers to these destinations. Because Zika virus is primarily spread by mosquitoes, travelers to any destination with Zika outbreaks should protect themselves from mosquito bites.

As of this date, no locally transmitted Zika cases have been reported in Georgia or anywhere in the United States, but cases *have been* reported in returning travelers. Zika virus is transmitted primarily through the bite of infected *Aedes* species mosquitoes, which **can** be found in Georgia. Sexual transmission of Zika has also be documented.

Pregnant women should not travel to areas where there is ongoing Zika virus transmission because of a link between Zika virus and birth defects. Studies are underway to determine if there is a connection between Zika virus infection and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) and other serious neurological disorders.

There is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika. Travelers should check [CDC travel advisories](#) for their destinations and take precautions to protect themselves from mosquitoes:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks
- Use EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE), or IR3535 (during travel and for **three weeks after returning home**)
- Use [permethrin-treated](#) clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents)
- Stay and sleep in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms or sleep under a mosquito net



Upon returning home from travel to Zika-affected countries, individuals should continue to use EPA-registered insect repellents for **three weeks** and follow precautions to prevent additional mosquito bites. The mosquitoes that spread Zika bite mostly during the daytime and tend to live around homes. They breed in containers so removing anything that holds water or dumping out standing water around the home after it rains will help reduce the number of these mosquitoes.

Please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or if I can provide additional help and guidance. For more information about Zika, log on to dph.georgia.gov/zika.

Whether students are heading out on spring break or just returning, I know you share my concern for their health. Thank you for helping disseminate this important information about protecting against Zika virus infection and preventing its spread in Georgia.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brenda Fitzgerald" followed by a stylized flourish.

Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.
Commissioner and State Health Officer