

March 18, 2016

Dear Travel Industry Professional,

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 and to ask your help in preventing its spread in Georgia.

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 been documented.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued travel warnings for 37 countries and territories where there is ongoing Zika virus transmission and that list continues to grow. There are many Georgia companies with worldwide business interests which necessitate frequent travel to these same areas. In addition, many of these places are popular tourist destinations, including the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Rio. I fully understand that travel to these areas will continue, but what I ask is that you, as travel industry professionals, advise your clients to protect themselves from mosquito bites when they are traveling and after returning home to prevent the spread of Zika virus.

There are urgent concerns about Zika virus infection and pregnant women. Zika virus can be spread from a mother to her fetus during pregnancy and infection during pregnancy has been linked to birth defects. Pregnant women should not travel to areas where there is ongoing Zika virus transmission. Studies are ongoing to determine if there is a link between Zika virus infection and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) and other serious neurological disorders.

Zika virus can be passed from an infected person to another mosquito through mosquito bites. An infected mosquito can then transmit the virus to other people. Most people with Zika virus never know they are infected making it important for *everyone* who has traveled to countries where there are Zika virus outbreaks to guard against additional mosquito bites.



Currently, 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.

DPH, with the cooperation of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, has placed signs on the international concourses and at the U.S. Customs area alerting travelers about Zika virus and offering protection and prevention measures. In addition, EPA-registered insect repellents will be available for purchase in shops on the concourses. Travelers should know that insect repellents with 20% to 30% DEET are recommended and that not all products containing DEET sold outside of the U.S. meet that standard.

Please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or if I can provide additional help and guidance. You can also find additional Zika virus information at dph.ga.gov

Working together, I know that we can protect all Georgians from Zika virus infection and prevent its spread in the state. I thank you for your help.

Very truly yours,



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