

Zika Virus Guidelines For Travelers Heading To The Caribbean

Public health authorities in the Caribbean are working diligently to mitigate the effects of the Zika virus. Zika, also known as ZIKV, is spread primarily by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.

The public-sector-led Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and its private sector counterpart, the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) are in close contact with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) to monitor and research the Zika cases that have now surfaced in some Caribbean destinations, and to communicate prevention and control measures to residents and visitors. The CTO and CHTA are in communication with their respective stakeholders and are observing national, regional and international health protocols in dealing with mosquito-borne viral diseases which can be found in tropical countries. With more than 700 islands in 30 territories in the Caribbean, conditions will vary from one nation to another. ZIKV is a mosquito-borne viral infection which is transmitted by the same *Aedes aegypti* mosquito which transmits dengue and chikungunya viruses. ZIKV was first detected in the Americas in 2014 and since then has spread to several other countries and territories. Since ZIKV is new to the Caribbean, almost everyone is susceptible to the infection. The most common symptoms of ZIKV infection are mild fever and skin rash, usually accompanied by conjunctivitis, muscle or joint pain, and general feeling of illness that begins 2-7 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Symptoms are similar to those of dengue and chikungunya and can last 2-7 days. ZIKV cannot be transmitted by close or casual contact with an infected person (i.e., not person to person) or through the air, food or water. **Prevention Messages for Travellers going to the Caribbean** There is no vaccine or treatment available for ZIKV, so prevention measures are essential. All travellers are advised to: Stay informed about the ZIKV situation in countries they are travelling to. Prevent mosquito bites: o Use insect repellents on exposed skin. Insect repellents that contain DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or IR3535 are the most effective and safe when used according to the label. If also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second. o Where possible, wear light coloured long-sleeved shirts and long pants, socks and shoes to minimize exposed skin. o When indoors use air conditioning and keep the doors and windows closed, unless they are screened, to keep out mosquitoes. If this is not possible, sleep under mosquito nets to prevent bites. What should you do if you feel sick and think you may have Zika? Consult a healthcare professional if you are feeling ill, especially if you have a fever. If you have returned home, make sure to tell them about your travel to the Caribbean. Use acetaminophen or paracetamol to treat fever and pain. Get lots of rest and drink plenty of liquids. A person infected with ZIKV will have the virus in their blood for the first week of infection. The virus can be passed on to other mosquitoes if they bite you while you are carrying the virus. Therefore, be especially careful to prevent mosquito bites during the first week to avoid spreading the disease. CTO and CHTA will continue to monitor all developments related to mosquito-borne viral diseases and to support appropriate communication, education and prevention initiatives.