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Changes to the Country Information pages: Zika

NaTHNaC has reviewed and updated country-specific Zika information and prevention advice

NaTHNaC and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) have recently reviewed destination-specific guidance for countries with a known or possible risk of Zika virus. [Further information is available](#) about this review.

Based on this review, three main risk categories now exist (**risk**, **very low risk** and **negligible risk**). Travel health advice related to risk categories has been amended to be less prescriptive and informed by the principles of shared decision making to allow the individual traveller, with their healthcare provider, to make decisions that are right for them, based on the best available evidence.

Verified outbreaks of Zika identified during epidemic intelligence scanning will be added to NaTHNaC's outbreak surveillance database to provide travellers, and those advising travellers, with the best available data to inform their decisions.

Country-specific recommendations have been updated for the following countries:

American Samoa, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Central African Republic, Chile (Easter Island only), Colombia, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Curaçao, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Fiji, France (Hyères city, Var department only), French Guiana, French Polynesia, Gabon, Ghana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mexico, Micronesia, Monserrat, Myanmar, New Caledonia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Saba, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, United States of America (Florida and Texas only), United States Virgin Islands, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Zika virus infection is usually a mild illness spread by mosquitoes which mainly feed during daytime hours and is currently reported in parts of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, Central and South America and the Caribbean. A small number of cases have also been spread by sexual contact [1].

Zika virus infection is usually a short-lived flu like illness, sometimes with a rash and itchy skin, severe disease is unusual. Neurological problems such as Guillain-Barré syndrome have also been reported, although this is not common. However, while serious complications and deaths from Zika are rare, infection in pregnancy can cause birth defects known as Congenital Zika Syndrome (microcephaly and other congenital anomalies) [1, 2].

There is no drug or vaccine to prevent Zika. The only way to try and prevent infection is by minimising mosquito bites or by avoiding visiting regions with a known or potential Zika risk.

Advice for travellers

Before you travel

Check the risk of Zika virus in all the countries you plan to visit. This is available from the 'Outbreaks' and 'Other Risks' section of our [Country Information pages](#).

If you are planning to visit countries reporting Zika virus, get travel health advice from your GP, practice nurse or a travel clinic, ideally at least four to six weeks before you travel.

This is particularly important if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, or if you have a severe, chronic medical condition or a weakened immune system ([immunosuppression](#)).

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, see UKHSA's advice about [Zika and pregnancy](#) before you travel. You should also be aware that the advice to prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus is different for men and women: [preventing Zika infection by sexual transmission](#).

While you are away

Reduce your risk by wearing long sleeves/trousers, applying insect repellent regularly and follow [insect and tick bite avoidance advice](#). If you are travelling with a partner, follow UKHSA advice about preventing Zika infection by sexual contact: [Barrier method to prevent sexual transmission](#) for the appropriate period of time advised for your circumstances: [Advice for individuals at greatest Zika virus risk](#).

When you return

If you are pregnant and visited a country with a **risk** of Zika virus transmission, you must get advice from your GP or midwife when you return to the United Kingdom (UK), even if you have not had any symptoms and feel completely well.

If you are pregnant and develop symptoms suggesting Zika virus infection while you are visiting or soon after you return from a country with a **very low risk** or **negligible** Zika risk, you should also get medical advice and contact your GP on return.

Remember to tell your doctor you recently travelled abroad and give details of every country you visited.

Advice for health professionals

You should carry out a comprehensive risk assessment with any traveller planning to visit destinations with Zika virus transmission. See our factsheet [Zika: Evaluating the risk to individual travellers](#) for more guidance.

Occasionally, if there is a large outbreak of Zika virus in a destination, with an associated high risk of Zika virus exposure, this will be highlighted by NaTHNaC and pregnant women should consider postponing non-essential travel until after their pregnancy. In other destinations, pregnant women should discuss the suitability of travel and the potential risk that Zika virus may present [2].

See the 'Other Risks' section of our [Country Information pages](#) for specific Zika risk category recommendations for affected countries.

UK Health Security Agency provide [health advice for women returning from a country or area with risk for Zika virus transmission](#).

Resources

- [European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: Zika virus disease](#)
- [NHS: Zika virus](#)
- [UKHSA Zika virus \(ZIKV\): clinical and travel guidance](#)
- [Zika virus in brief](#)

References

1. World Health Organization. Zika virus. 8 December 2022. [Accessed 28 December 2023]
2. UK Health Security Agency. Zika virus: symptoms and complications. Last updated 2 August 2017. [Accessed 28 December 2023]