



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING ZIKA AND TRAVEL TO THE
CARIBBEAN
BY THE CARIBBEAN TOURISM ORGANIZATION
AND THE CARIBBEAN HOTEL AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION

The spread of the Zika virus in the Americas, with Brazil as the epicentre, and the possible though not yet proven accompanying link to microcephaly has, understandably, caused concern. The Level 2 alert issued by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created doubt among some potential travellers to the Caribbean as to whether or not their health is at risk and whether or not they should continue with their travel plans.

Conflicting information about the virus, coupled with the yet unconfirmed link to microcephaly, has led to uncertainty and confusion, which in turn leads to panic.

The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) are aware that you have a number of questions about your travel plans. We have therefore compiled a series of Frequently Asked Questions in relation to Zika and travel to the Caribbean. We hope you will find these details helpful. We implore you not to panic.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

How is the Zika Virus impacting Caribbean Tourism?

It's too early to tell but all indications are that there are very few cancellations as a result of Zika. The Caribbean set a record for visitors arrivals in 2015 and all indications point to continued growth and its popularity as one of the world's most desirable warm weather destinations.

Should I cancel my Caribbean holiday?

No. However, as always we advise you to travel sensibly and to take the necessary precautions to protect yourself against insect bites, including mosquito bites, in very much the same way you would on any holiday in any tropical country. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other health agencies, including the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have said that Zika symptoms for the vast majority of people are mild and last two to seven days. In fact, according to the WHO and the CDC, four in five people who contract the virus never know they got it, and if you get it once you develop immunity for life.

What are some of the concerns?

Concerns have been raised about a condition known as microcephaly and its effects on the unborn children of pregnant women. However, the WHO itself has stated several times that it has no proof of a link between Zika and microcephaly. In fact, there is other research that suggests there is no link and that there are other causes of the suspected rise in cases in Brazil. There are also no reported cases of microcephaly linked to Zika outbreaks in other countries or regions. Also, according to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), microcephaly is extremely rare in the Caribbean and there are no cases linked to Zika.

How worried is the Caribbean that Zika and the extensive news coverage will impact tourism this year?

We take the health and safety of our guests very seriously. Based on the evidence, we firmly believe that the Zika virus does not pose an extraordinary threat to visitors to the Caribbean. We will continue to closely monitor developments and if fresh evidence emerges that suggests otherwise we will advise accordingly.

In the meantime, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) remain in close contact with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) to monitor and research the Zika cases in the Caribbean and to communicate prevention and control measures to residents and visitors, while the health authorities in our member countries are taking the necessary steps to limit the number of new cases.

Local populations and visitors alike are assured that the Caribbean remains open for business and safe for travel. The CTO and CHTA will continue to work closely with CARPHA to assess the situation, but we encourage visitors to continue with their travel plans to the Caribbean and follow the advice and precautions issued by the World Health Organization, similar to those which are provided to travelers to most tropical destinations.

Note also that the World Health Organization has not issued any travel restrictions to affected countries.

Which Caribbean countries are most at risk?

The Zika outbreak has been concentrated in Brazil and South America, with approximately 1.5 million suspected cases in Brazil. By contrast, there have been around 200 suspected cases in the Caribbean, spread across about a dozen of the region's 30-plus countries. Most individuals who contracted the virus have already recovered.

What special measures are Caribbean tourism industry and health authorities taking to calm guest's nerves or head off their concerns?

Caribbean countries and hotels continue their proactive measures similar to those used to combat other mosquito-borne viruses. Staff and guests are being provided with the necessary information so they become familiar with how it can be prevented, how it can be transmitted, its signs and symptoms. Insect repellent containing DEET is being placed in hotel rooms, or made easily available for purchase.

Many of our member countries undertake national clean-up campaigns to try to eradicate breeding grounds, while an increasing number of hotels install mosquito screens on windows and/or supply guests with bed nets in areas where the sleeping quarters are exposed to the outdoors.

Which airlines have you confirmed have taken this measure regarding travel, specifically to the Caribbean?

We are aware that a number of airlines, cruise lines and tour operators have announced cancellation or change policies. These policies vary from carrier to carrier and we encourage travellers to check with their travel agents or carrier if

they are uncertain of the policy. We also recommend that you check with your hotel to inquire about its policy on cancellations and/or change of dates of guests.

How can visitors to the Caribbean protect themselves from contracting Zika?

We continue to encourage visitors to protect themselves from mosquito bites by using long lasting repellents containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 on exposed skin. Many of our guests come to the region to enjoy the sunshine, therefore, we advise those using both sunscreen and insect repellent, to apply the sunscreen first, then the repellent.

What is the Caribbean's call to action?

Firstly, there is no reason to panic, but ensure precautions are taken to protect yourself from insect bites and stay informed about the Zika virus. The number of cases in the Caribbean is small and we anticipate that proliferation will be limited. However, we continue to encourage all communities to approach this matter seriously and aggressively, recognizing that the most effective way to control Zika is to eliminate mosquitoes.