

Zika Policy for Health Talents International

Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause serious neurological defects in babies, including microcephaly, eye problems and other neurological problems. Zika is spread by the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus and can also be spread by sexual contact. It is estimated that only about 20% of people infected by Zika develop symptoms. Recently a staff member at Clinica Ezell contracted Zika, probably at or near the Clinic, and has recovered fully. This indicates that the risk is real. With these facts in mind and until further notice, Health Talents is now instituting the following policy for persons applying as team members and others traveling from North America to Guatemala and Nicaragua.

POLICY

The following persons MAY NOT participate in these trips:

1. Women who are pregnant (at any stage).
2. A married women who is trying to conceive (not using any effective means of birth control).
3. A man whose wife is in categories 1 or 2 above.

This policy assumes that single men and women are not sexually active. This policy may be amended as further knowledge of Zika virus infection and transmission develops.

May 19, 2016

This information is provided in response to the recent CDC warning regarding the Zika virus and its presence in Latin America, and for our purposes in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Here is the link to the CDC alert and we encourage you to take the time to inform yourself.

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>

Here is summary of the most common questions, or anticipated questions, by our volunteers, along with our reply.

1. Is the Zika virus found in Guatemala and Nicaragua? *Yes, the Zika virus is in Guatemala and Nicaragua and as recently as April of 2016, a staff member of Health Talents working at our Guatemala base of operation, Clinica Ezell, tested positive for Zika, and has since fully recovered.*
2. Who is at the greatest risk of long-term implications? *The Zika virus infection in a pregnant woman carries a risk of serious birth defects in the baby. (Note it is the fetus or infant at risk for birth complications. The mother's symptoms are most often akin to a mild case of the flu, but there have been reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome also.)*
3. If infected, can the virus be transmitted upon my return to the US? *The virus is transmitted to humans from a mosquito bite. It can also be transmitted between persons by sexual contact.*

4. What if I need to cancel my planned participation? *We certainly understand why you may make this decision and will refund you all recoverable expenses. That will typically mean your deposit and/or trip fee. If a plane ticket has been purchased, we cannot automatically refund the price of your ticket. However, American, Delta and United are all three working with ticketed passengers to provide refunds or waivers for change fees on a future booking. Their policies are not universal; United will refund if pregnant, American requires a doctor's notice and Delta will discuss options. If the airline reimburses Health Talents International, we will refund you, or your donors, for tickets we purchased. Note: We cannot refund you directly, for funds donors have given on your behalf.*

In all cases a team member who develops symptoms on return should consult his/her physician immediately, even those persons not in the categories above.

- *What can I do to reduce my chances of infection? Not getting bitten is your best defense, thus mosquito repellent and defensive attire and lodging offer the best forms of defense. Insect Shield is a company that provides clothing treatment services if you'd like to send off your garments for treatment with permethrin. You may also purchase permethrin online or most stores selling camping supplies and treat your clothes yourself.*
 - a. http://www.insectshield.com/IS_Your_Own_Clothes%5Cdefault.aspx
- *What is Health Talents International doing to protect their US and Canadian volunteers? Beyond providing information and links to the CDC...*
 - a. *We fumigate our coastal facility at Clínica Ezell throughout the year to safeguard our ministry team and our surgical teams.*
 - b. *Our property is searched for areas of standing water, such as a pot or bucket, and emptied of water to reduce the mosquito breeding environment.*
 - c. *All bed linens are treated with permethrin, both a repellent and insecticide as a safeguard while sleeping.*
 - d. *The curtains over the windows are also treated with permethrin.*
 - e. *Mosquito repellent is maintained on property for those who forget to bring their own.*
 - f. *Citronelle candles and torches are provided for outside areas such as our patios in the dormitory.*

Disclaimer: Health Talents International does not intend to address all concerns or provide all answers related to the Zika virus in this memo. You are strongly encouraged to read the alerts provided by the CDC and consult with your physician. Zika, unlike other mosquito born viruses, is of particular concern because of the potential for very serious birth defects should a women become infected.

By participating in one of our trips or programs, you acknowledge that you recognize and accept this risk, holding Health Talents International harmless.

Upon registering to participate in a Health Talents international trip, you are required to acknowledge that you have received and reviewed a comprehensive disclaimer before submitting your trip form.