



## **ZIKA BRIEF FOR CARIBBEAN TRAVEL PARTNERS**

### ***Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Zika and Travel to the Caribbean by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association***

The spread of the Zika virus in the Americas 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 and parts of the United States as to whether or not their health is at risk and whether or not they should continue with their travel plans.

The Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) is aware that our travel partners and consumers have a number of questions about travel to the region. We have therefore compiled this brief with Frequently Asked Questions in relation to Zika and travel to the Caribbean. We hope you will find these details helpful.

#### ***How is the Zika Virus impacting Caribbean Tourism?***

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. Overnight visitor arrivals to the region in 2016 are expected to increase over the banner last year. While there have been some cancellations, the overwhelming majority of travelers have continued with their travel plans. There have been reports of cancellations but these have been sporadic and limited.

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

Since January, 2016 hundreds of Caribbean hotels and countries have aggressively taken proactive measures similar to those used to combat other mosquito-borne viruses. CHTA has partnered with its public sector counterpart, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Caribbean Association of Public Health Agencies (CARPHA) in support of these measures. Among the initiatives which have been undertaken are:

- **Information and Awareness** 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.
- **Vector Management Programs** Caribbean hotels have put in place aggressive vector management programs, many utilizing the latest methods and technologies using non-chemical controls. Hotels are being trained to identify and eliminate breeding grounds. Many hotels are also extending their management and public education efforts beyond the immediate hotel grounds, to surrounding communities.

- **Guest Precautions** Guests are being advised to use insect long-lasting repellent containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of eucalyptus, or IR3535 on exposed skin. This is often being placed in hotel rooms, or made easily available for purchase. 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.

Employees and guests are advised to wear protective clothing if not using repellent during dawn and dusk, the times when the zika-carrying mosquito is active. 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.

- **Clean-Up Campaigns** Many of the region's countries have undertaken national clean-up campaigns to help eradicate breeding grounds.

### ***Should travelers cancel their 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. Pregnant women should take extra precautions and consult with their medical professional if their concerns about travel persist. Women seeking to become pregnant or who are at a high risk of pregnancy, should take precautions to avoid becoming pregnant.

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. According to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), microcephaly is extremely rare in the Caribbean. However, with its connection with Zika, pregnant women or women seeking to become pregnant should use extra precautions and seek counsel from their physician prior to traveling to affected areas. Zika has also been linked to a condition called Guillain-Barre which causes temporary paralysis. Most individuals, however, have good recovery from even the most severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome, although some continue to have a certain degree of weakness.

Whilst most Zika virus infections are transmitted via the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, a relatively small number of persons have contracted Zika through sex from a person who has Zika. Zika can be transmitted through vaginal, anal and oral sex. The virus has been detected in semen, vaginal fluids, saliva, urine, and breast milk. There is no documented evidence that Zika can be transmitted through saliva during deep kissing. To reduce the risk of sexual transmission of Zika virus infection, condom use is recommended while living or visiting an area with active Zika virus transmission. A male with Zika symptoms who has a partner at risk of pregnancy is recommended to use condoms at the onset of illness and should continue use for 6 months. Female partners may choose to use other forms of effective contraception in addition to condoms to avoid becoming pregnant.

## ***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 and the aggressive mosquito control efforts being undertaken by hotels and Governments throughout the region, 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 as well as to subtropical locations in the continental United States.

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

## ***What is the Caribbean's call to action?***

Firstly, there is no reason to panic, but ensure precautions are taken to protect ones-self from insect bites and stay informed about the Zika virus. The number of cases in the Caribbean is relatively small and we anticipate that proliferation will be limited, due to the proactive work being undertaken. 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.

## ***Where can I get updated information?***

Detailed information can be found in a Zika section established on the Caribbean Association of Public Health Agencies website, where guidelines also can be downloaded, providing advice to travelers, hotels and guest houses. The United States Centers for Disease Control maintains a Zika section on their website. The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association also provides support information to hotels, their employees, visitors and potential visitors through its Zika resource center. Webinars of training sessions on effective vector control and management can be viewed on the site.

## ***For more information visit:***

**Caribbean Association of Public Health Agencies:**

<http://carpha.org/zika>

**Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association:**

<http://www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/knowledge/learning-tools/resources/>

**United States Centers for Disease Control:**

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