

# Athletes in Rio stay inside, lather on repellent for Zika

January 31 2016, by Stephen Wade

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In this Oct. 22, 2011 file photo, Cuba's gold medalist Lisette Hechevarria, left, competes with Brazil's Aline Ferreira da Silva, also known as Aline Silva, during the women's wrestling Greco-Roman 72 kg at the Pan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Silva has had the dengue fever twice, and said she's not taking any chances with the Zika virus. "For me it's very worrying," said Silva, who said she applies repellent about every 90 minutes when she's away from home. (AP Photo/Daniel Ochoa de Olza, File)

Aline Silva has had the dengue fever twice, and she's not taking any chances with the Zika virus.

Silva is a Brazilian wrestler who hopes to win an Olympic medal in just over six months in Rio de Janeiro. At a test event on Sunday for the games— at a venue in Rio's new Olympic Park—she wasn't alone in being concerned.

Several non-Brazilian athletes talked about lathering on mosquito repellent, staying in their hotel rooms and away from the water and the beaches in order to avoid mosquitoes.

Brazil is an epicenter of the rapidly spreading Zika virus, a mosquito-borne disease that Brazilian scientists say is linked to a [rare birth defect](#).

The growing international health emergency around Zika could scare athletes and fans from coming to South America's first Olympics as organizers prepare for hundreds of thousands of visitors.

"For me it's very worrying," said Silva, who said she applies repellent about every 90 minutes when she's away from home.

"Really, the biggest problem is in training and competing—when I can't use it (repellent)," she said. "I have had dengue twice, so I am aware about all of this. Maybe I am more worried than most."



In this July 17, 2015 file photo, United States' wrestler Adeline Gray celebrates her gold medal win at the Pan Am Games in Mississauga, Ontario. Gray, a three-time world champion who will be an Olympic favorite for gold in 2016, raised the issue of Zika's link to birth defects and cases of babies being born with unusually small heads and possible brain damage. "I think if I was planning to have a child next month, I would be extremely uneasy about this," said Gray, who competes in the 75-kilogram class. "Maybe that would have changed my decision (to come here)." Gray said her coaches have banned her from going swimming in Brazil during her short stay. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull, File)

Asked if other Brazilian athletes were concerned about Zika, Silva replied: "Yes, of course."

American wrestler Adeline Gray, a three-time world champion who will be an Olympic favorite for gold, raised the issue of Zika's link to birth defects and cases of babies being born with unusually small heads and possible brain damage.

"I think if I was planning to have a child next month, I would be extremely uneasy about this," said Gray, who competes in the 75-kilogram class. "Maybe that would have changed my decision (to come here)."

Gray said her coaches have banned her from going swimming in Brazil during her short stay.

"Unfortunately we're not spending too much time outside. We're wearing long sleeves, long pants and just making sure we have on as much bug spray as we can."

Gray said she's trying to avoid the distraction. As several reporters kept asking her questions, she politely stepped away to watch an on-going match at the new Carioca Arena 1.

"This anxiety has to kind of subside so you can focus on what you are doing," she said. "If you are worried about that in the back of your mind, then you're not doing your job well enough."

Japan coach Shigeo Kinase gave similar advice to his wrestlers about staying indoors.

"We are trying not to leave the hotel too often," he said. "If my athletes go out shopping, I go with them."

Rio organizers have been scouring Olympics venues daily for two weeks, looking for standing water where mosquitoes breed. Rio spokesman Mario Andrada said the inspections would continue daily until the games open on Aug. 5. That will be in Brazil's winter when it's cooler, drier and the mosquito population is smaller.

Andrada emphasized that no one is publicly talking about cancelling or

postponing the games.

"This has never been mentioned. No way," Andrada said. "It's impossible to do that. There is no reason to do that."

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