

Olympics: WHO committee says low risk of Zika spread

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There is a "very low risk" of the Zika virus spreading further internationally as a result of the Olympic Games in Brazil, the World Health Organization's emergency committee on the disease said Tuesday.

The statement came as worry mounted that the mosquito-borne virus, which has spread across much of Latin America and which can lead to severe birth defects in babies, might spread further when the Olympics begin in August.

"The Committee concluded that there is a very low risk of further international spread of Zika virus as a result of the Olympic and Paralympic Games as Brazil will be hosting the Games during the Brazilian winter," the WHO said.

The global health agency explained that the intensity of the transmission of viruses like dengue and Zika "will be minimal".

Brazilian authorities are "intensifying vector-control measures in and around the venues for the Games which should further reduce the risk of transmission," the WHO said.

"There should be no general restrictions on travel and trade with countries, areas and/or territories with Zika virus transmission."

The committee however said Brazil should make sure it boosts its

control measures in cities where the Games will be held.

In Brazil, some 1.5 million people have been infected with the virus, and nearly 1,300 babies have been born with microcephaly—abnormally small heads and brains—since the outbreak of Zika began there last year.

The virus, which usually causes only mild, flu-like symptoms, can also trigger adult-onset neurological problems such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome, which can cause paralysis and death.

In an added complication, there is limited, but growing evidence that Zika can be transmitted sexually.

There is no vaccine for Zika.

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