

# Pregnant or planning to be? How to protect yourself from Zika virus

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(HealthDay)—As the threat of the Zika virus grows in the United States,

pregnant women and those trying to conceive need to take precautions, a fetal medicine doctor says.

Zika poses the greatest risk to [pregnant women](#) during the first trimester, said Dr. Joseph Biggio, director of the division of maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Pregnant women and those trying to become pregnant should avoid or limit travel to areas where Zika is being transmitted. And, they should discuss travel plans to these areas with their doctor, Biggio said in a university news release.

While microcephaly (a [birth defect](#) where a baby has an abnormally small head and brain) has been the primary concern, Zika can also cause other [brain abnormalities](#), stillbirth and damage to the eyes and hearing, according to Biggio.

To date, all Zika virus cases in the United States have been associated with travel to countries where Zika transmission is occurring. While the risk of being infected with Zika in the United States is low, Biggio said, women need to take precautions.

"If you are pregnant, I recommend protecting yourself and your baby by using [insect repellents](#)," Biggio said.

Insect repellents that contain DEET and picaridin are thought to be safe for pregnant women. Spray repellent on clothes instead of the skin to try to reduce absorption, he said.

The Zika virus remains in the bloodstream for one to two weeks after infection, but it's not known how long the virus can be transmitted in an infected man's semen, Biggio said. It's recommended that men who have traveled to Zika-affected areas use condoms regularly to avoid exposing

a pregnant partner or a partner who may become pregnant, he said.

This advice should be followed for at least six months if the man has Zika symptoms, and a minimum of eight weeks if he doesn't have symptoms, according to Biggio.

**More information:** Visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for more on the Zika virus.

This Q&A will tell you [what you need to know about Zika](#).

To see the CDC list of sites where Zika virus is active and may pose a threat to pregnant women, click [here](#).

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