



THE ZIKA VIRUS – HOW IS IT IMPACTING THE MEETINGS & TRAVEL INDUSTRY?



Over the last several months, you may have heard increasingly more buzz about the Zika virus - but what is this virus, and how is it impacting the meetings and travel industry?

The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness that originated in Africa in the 1940s. It began spreading to the South Pacific in the mid-2000s, arrived in Brazil around 2014, and has since spread at an alarming rate. Symptoms of the Zika virus range from fever, rash, and joint pain, to significant birth defects in babies of mothers who are infected with the virus while pregnant, including miscarriage and death at birth. The disease has also been linked to brain and nerve damage in adults, including Guillain-Barré syndrome. As of now, no vaccine exists to prevent the Zika virus.

With news of the Zika virus' continued spreading in the Americas, including more than 380 confirmed cases in the United States, the meetings and travel industry has been on high alert. According to a [recent survey of meeting planners conducted by M&C](#), more than one-third of respondents had moved or canceled meetings that were scheduled to take place in high-impact areas, such as, Brazil, Mexico, Central America, or the Caribbean. Another 27% of respondents with meetings in affected areas had experienced attendee cancellations as a result of the virus.

Despite some event cancellations, many planners intend to move forward with hosting meetings and events in areas impacted by the Zika virus. For those traveling to these areas, the U.S. Travel

Association has assembled a [Zika toolkit](#) that is an excellent compilation of the most up-to-date information regarding the virus' impact on the travel industry. The toolkit includes talking points, quotes from experts, and news updates that can help to inform planners who may be hosting, or who are considering hosting, a meeting or event in an area impacted by the Zika virus.

In addition to these tools, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has provided an [array of resources](#) pertaining to the Zika virus, including recommendations for keeping yourself and others safe. These recommendations include:



1. **Keeping mosquitoes outside** – including staying in areas with windows, doors and screens.
2. **Creating a barrier between you and mosquitoes** – including wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, and using a mosquito bed net if you are overseas or outside.
3. **Wearing insect repellent** – including those with active ingredients like DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or para-menthane-diol.
4. **Protecting your family** – including dressing your children in clothing that covers their arms and legs; keeping cribs, strollers and baby carriers covered; and utilizing age-appropriate and child-safe insect repellent products. If you are pregnant, in order to keep your unborn child safe, it is highly recommended that you do not travel to areas impacted by the virus.
5. **Protecting your partner** – Because pregnant women are so susceptible to the virus, it is crucial that if your partner is pregnant and you are infected, extra precaution be taken to protect her and the developing fetus from contracting the virus.
6. **Doing your homework before traveling** – before traveling, research what areas have been impacted, and ensure you fully understand the risks and precautions you need to take to protect yourself from the virus.

As the CDC and the government discuss and prepare to further address the spread of the Zika virus, it is important for meeting planners, and those considering traveling to areas of high-impact, to remain informed about the latest developments pertaining to the virus. Keeping yourself and your meeting attendees informed, and making certain they understand the risks, as well as methods for protecting themselves, is crucial to ensuring safe and successful meetings, events, and travel opportunities in areas impacted by the Zika virus.