



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 29, 2016

U.S. Zika Cases Increasing; Some Light Shed on Impact of Virus on Unborn

The latest figures out of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that Zika cases in the United States continue to increase, and those involving pregnant women are shedding some light on the varying factors that influence the impact of the virus on the unborn.

The CDC announced Friday that the number of Zika cases in the United States has grown as U.S. travelers returning from Zika-ridden areas are infected with the virus. As of Friday, there are now 107 cases of the virus among returning U.S. travelers, with an additional 40 locally acquired cases in U.S. territories, and 117 cases in Puerto Rico that were reported after the CDC totaled the aforementioned figures.

Despite travel warnings issued to pregnant woman, there are currently nine cases of the virus among pregnant women in the United States who have traveled to Zika-affected areas.

CNN reports that most of the women have at least two of the more common symptoms related to the virus, including fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes. Six of the women reported symptoms in their first trimester, and two have had miscarriages.

“It’s important to note that 10-20% of all pregnancies end in a spontaneous miscarriage, so the fact that [Zika is] present doesn’t necessarily mean that it caused them. However, its presence in the placenta is certainly suggestive that it may have,” said CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden.

Two of the women have chosen to terminate their pregnancies, and one woman gave birth to a child with severe microcephaly. One pregnancy is ongoing.

“We did not expect to see these brain abnormalities in this small case series of U.S. pregnant travelers, so it is unexpected and greater than we would have expected,” stated Dr. Denise Jamieson, a medical officer with the CDC division of reproductive medicine and part of the Zika response team.

Two of the women contracted the virus during their second semester, with one delivering a baby who appears to be healthy, and the other experiencing no complications thus far. One pregnant woman contracted the virus during her third trimester and also delivered what appears to be a healthy baby.

CNN writes, “These details may help determine conclusively if Zika virus causes microcephaly and what other contributing factors there are, such as phase of pregnancy during infection or whether the mother-to-be experiences symptoms.”

The CDC has created a new test for the Zika virus that has been approved for emergency use by the FDA, to be used for those returning from Zika-ridden areas. It detects antibodies in the blood from four





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days to 12 weeks after symptoms begin.

Meanwhile, the connection between the Zika virus and birth defects has prompted calls to lighten restrictions on abortion laws throughout Zika-affected regions. The *Washington Post* writes,

In El Salvador, where abortion is banned, the health minister has argued for a revision of the law because of the dangers the virus poses to fetal development. In Colombia and Brazil, there have been efforts to lift certain restrictions on abortions as the virus has spread explosively through the continent, but those efforts have encountered stiff opposition, particularly from religious authorities.

But according to the *Post*, making the decision to terminate a pregnancy because of the possibility of microcephaly creates a particular ethical dilemma, since detecting microcephaly and its effects on an unborn child can be difficult because ultrasounds are able to reveal only so much. “While head size does sometimes correlate with the severity of the impact, that is not always the case,” the *Post* notes.

Additionally, experts have stated that as many as 10 to 15 percent of those diagnosed with microcephaly at birth do not have intellectual impairment.

Still, the United Nations has used the Zika virus to advocate legalized abortion across the pro-life Latin American countries. In a statement published on the UN Human Rights website, Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein openly attacked Latin American defense of the unborn: “Laws and policies that restrict [a woman’s] access to [reproductive health] services must be urgently reviewed in line with human rights obligations.”

Likewise, feminist organizations in Brazil have petitioned the Supreme Federal Court to legalize abortion in cases of “malformation of the fetus,” according to Catholic News Agency, compelling Brazil’s bishops to issue a statement that Zika provides “no justification whatsoever to promote abortion.”

Pope Francis has stated that the Zika outbreak has made the use of contraceptives morally acceptable, citing a decision made by Pope Paul VI in the 1960s to allow nuns in the Belgian Congo at high risk of rape to use contraception to prevent pregnancies. On abortion, however, he remains adamant that it should not be an option. “Abortion isn’t a lesser evil, it’s a crime,” he told reporters earlier this month. “Taking one life to save another, that’s what the Mafia does. It’s a crime. It’s an absolute evil.”



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