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The risk of Zika virus transmission for Australian tourists visiting south America

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Introduction: The Zika virus (ZIKV) is a mosquito-borne flavivirus (Aedes) first identified in Uganda [1947] with the first human infection identified in Nigeria. The current epidemic in South America is the third of its type after Yap Island, Micronesia and French Polynesia [2013]. One of my family members travelled to South America in 2016 with three others backpacking for four months. This abstract reviews the literature to identify the risk of Zika virus infection in these young Australians.

Methods: Lewnard and colleagues estimate International Zika virus spread from the 2016 Olympics in Brazil to be 6 to 80 persons acquiring infection. The ratio of asymptomatic to symptomatic persons is 4:1. An individual traveller's probability of acquiring infection in Rio de Janeiro ranged from 1 in 6200 to 1 in 56300. These young Australians were given preventative measure advice; active ingredient - picaridin insect repellent, to wear long sleeved clothing and to use insect netting. Given these backpackers were often outside, their exposure to mosquitoes maybe greater.

Results: On return none experienced symptoms that I am aware of. One insect repellent bottle was ½ utilised. Viewing of photographs on facebook showed they wore both short and long sleeved clothing. Travel clinic GP follow up for one traveller did not include any specific questionnaires or testing for Zika virus.

Conclusion/Recommendation: Media hype causes disproportionate anxiety. Actual risk is relatively low according to the scientific literature.

Biography

Deborah Hilton has the qualifications of a B Pty, and a MPH. Her dissertation was an analysis of the Australian Diabetes Screening Study, and this was published in the Medical Journal of Australia. Her research gate profile is listing 14 research items [publications], which have been read over 1500 times and there has been approximately 250 citations. Her website is at; Deborah Hilton Statistics Online <http://sites.google.com/site/deborahhilton/>. Her CV lists 11 peer reviewed publications, 1 manuscript acknowledgement, 1 grant successfully applied for, 22 poster presentations, 1 book acknowledgement, 7 paper conference presentations, and various other adhoc work including 18 short articles written.

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