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ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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NEWS RELEASE

ADPH issues advisory for pregnant women
considering travel to areas with the Zika virus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health advises pregnant women to consider postponing travel to areas where the Zika virus is being transmitted, including areas in South and Central America as well as the American territories including Puerto Rico.

Infection with the Zika virus causes only mild symptoms in the majority of the cases, but an apparent link to birth defects and other pregnancy-related poor outcomes has been associated with infection during pregnancy. Out of an abundance of precaution, the ADPH is recommending that health care providers advise their patients who are pregnant about the risk of travel to these areas.

Testing should be performed on anyone who has a travel history to an infected area and is symptomatic. In addition, providers are asked to evaluate all pregnant women with a history of travel to countries with Zika virus transmission during pregnancy regardless of whether symptomatic or not. A HAN ALERT has been sent to Alabama physicians asking them to please contact the ADPH if they have patients with a travel history and signs and symptoms consistent with Zika virus infection.

Zika virus is being primarily transmitted through the bites of *Aedes species* mosquitoes. The mosquitoes are the same species that transmit Dengue and Chikungunya viruses, also associated with travel-related illness over the past few years. Specifically, the countries and areas include: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Venezuela and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Since transmission is ongoing, the public is asked to check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) website for updated travel notices.

This advisory follows medical reports in Brazil of children born with microcephaly, a condition in which children are born with abnormally small heads and often have issues with brain

development. Other poor pregnancy outcomes have been noted in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant.

Special precautions need to be taken for pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant:

- Pregnant women in any trimester should consider postponing travel to the areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. Pregnant women who must travel to one of these areas should talk with their doctor or other health care provider first and strictly follow steps to avoid mosquito bites during the trip.
- Women trying to become pregnant should consult with their health care provider before traveling to these areas and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika. Four in five people who acquire Zika infection may have no symptoms. Illness from Zika is usually mild and does not require hospitalization. Travelers are strongly urged to protect themselves by preventing mosquito bites:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or IR3535. Always use as directed.
 - Insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, and IR3535 are safe for pregnant and nursing women and children older than 2 months when used according to the product label. Oil of lemon eucalyptus products should not be used on children under 3 years of age.
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents).
- Stay and sleep in screened-in or air-conditioned rooms.