

Zika Virus: Most Canadians would reconsider travel plans to avoid infection

High levels of concern for athletes and spectators traveling to 2016 Olympics in Rio

May 12, 2016 – As summer approaches in the Northern Hemisphere, the medical community is [anxiously waiting](#) to see whether warmer weather will bring with it an epidemic of Zika virus – the mosquito-borne illness that has been linked to increased risk of birth defects in newborn babies.

While conditions in Canada are far from ideal for a Zika outbreak, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians fairly concerned about the virus becoming a public health issue here; and willing to reconsider travel plans in order to avoid bringing it back with them.

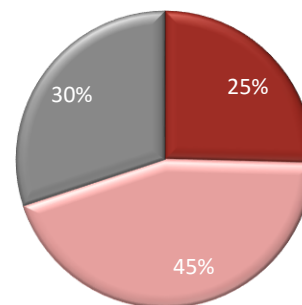
Canadians are also broadly worried about the effect this summer's Olympic Games in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, could have in spreading the disease.

Key Findings:

- Most Canadians (70%) would either cancel (25%) or reconsider (45%) plans to travel to an area where they could contract Zika, assuming they had such plans
- Surprisingly, those who say they're at least somewhat likely to become pregnant in the next few years are not significantly more likely than other groups to say they would change travel plans because of the risk of Zika
- Most Canadians express concern about Zika becoming a public health issue in Canada, either via people traveling here from infected regions (72%) or by sexual transmission (51%)

Assuming that you had plans to visit one of the places where conditions for transmitting Zika are ideal later this year, would you:

- Cancel your travel plans to that area because of the Zika virus
- Reconsider, but not rule it out
- Stick with your travel plans and still visit that region



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 28 – May 2, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1,508 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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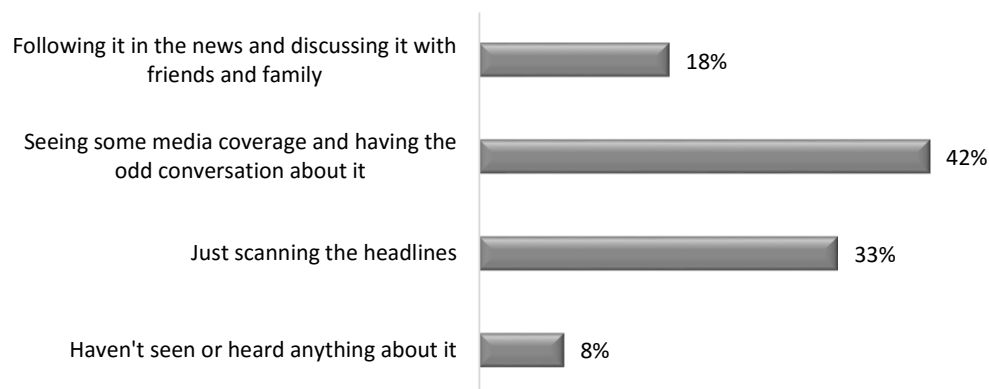
Most would at least reconsider travel plans because of Zika

Since last May – when a Zika outbreak in Brazil was linked to an increase in microcephaly, a condition which causes babies to be born with abnormally small heads and is associated with abnormal brain development – there has been a steady stream of news stories about [the spread of the virus](#), and [the fight to contain it](#).

This widespread coverage has left nine-in-ten Canadians with at least some awareness of the virus. Just 8 per cent say they “haven’t seen or heard anything about it.”

That said, fewer than one-in-five Canadians (18%) have been highly engaged with the story, following it closely and discussing it with friends and family:

In recent months, there have been some news stories about the Zika virus, a mosquito-borne illness. How closely have you been following this issue? Would you say you are:



Though it can be [transmitted sexually](#), Zika is primarily contracted via mosquito bites. Researchers from Oxford University have projected that some [2.2 billion people live in “at risk” areas](#), where conditions for transmission of the virus are ideal.

Canada, with its temperate climate and lack of the type of mosquitoes that most commonly spread Zika, is not considered an “at risk” area. The roughly 50 cases of the virus [confirmed in Canada](#) thus far have either been sexually transmitted or brought back to the country from a place where Zika is transmitted via mosquitoes.

When asked what they would do if they had plans to travel to such a place, one-in-four Canadians (25%) say they would cancel their trip, and another 45 per cent say they would reconsider traveling, but not rule it out.

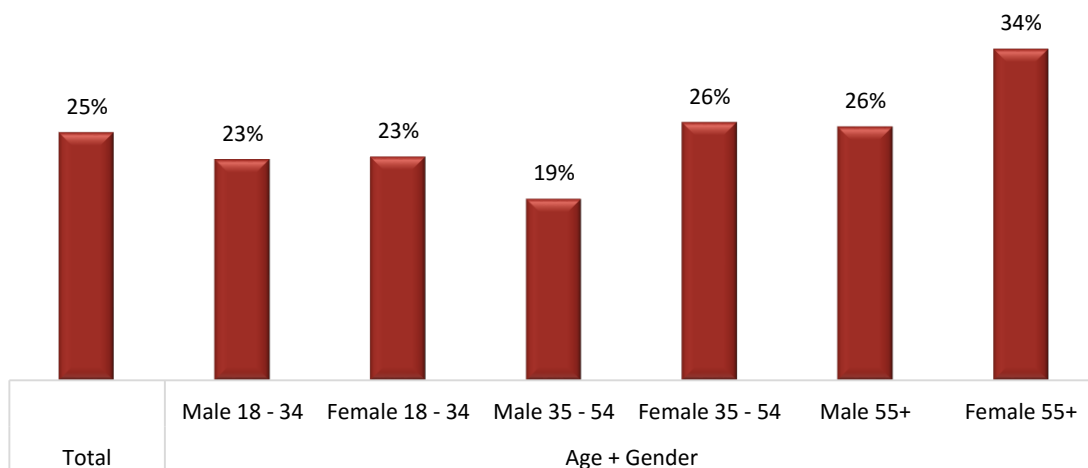
Among those paying closest attention to the news reports about the virus, the proportion who say they would cancel a trip to a region where they could get Zika from a mosquito bite rises to one-in-three (33%, see summary tables at the end of this release).

There is also a difference in opinion on this question between men and women, with the latter more likely to say they'd cancel plans (28% versus 22% of men), and less likely to say they would stick to their travel agenda.

At first glance, this finding might appear to be related to the risk Zika poses to pregnant women, but a closer look at the data finds this is not the case.

As seen in the graph that follows, the women most likely to say they would cancel their plans are those ages 55 and older, well past their child-bearing years. Younger women, meanwhile, are no more likely than young men to say they would call off travel because of Zika fears:

Percentage who would cancel travel plans to visit an area 'at-risk' for Zika transmission if they had them:



Also more likely to say they would cancel plans outright: People with lower levels of formal education (high school or less) and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or less ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

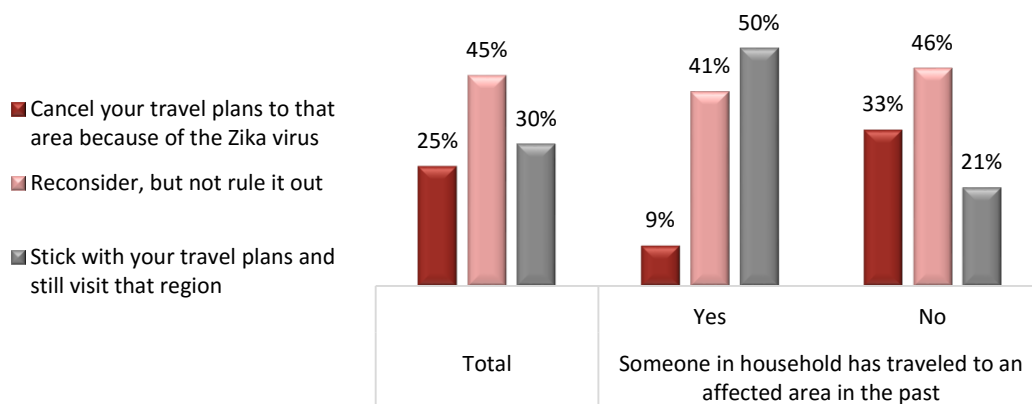
Past travel experiences affect reaction to Zika

When shown [the Oxford-developed map](#) of regions suitable for Zika transmission, roughly three-in-ten Canadians (31%) say someone in their household – either themselves, someone else, or both – has been to one of the highlighted areas in the last five years.

These Canadians with household experience of at-risk regions have a vastly different take on the travel plans question than other respondents.

Among this group, fully half (50%) say they would stick to their plans and still visit the region. That's five times as many as say they would cancel their plans:

Assuming that you had plans to visit one of the places where conditions for transmitting Zika are ideal later this year, would you:

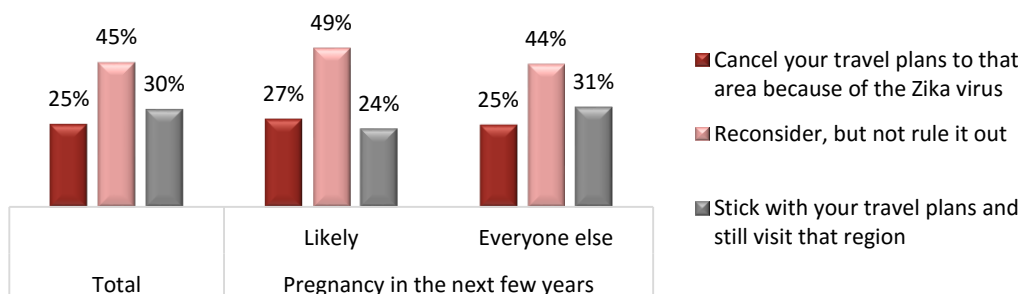


Concern among those likely to become pregnant?

Perhaps surprisingly, given that Zika's most serious effects are seen in newborn babies, Canadians who identify themselves or their romantic partners as likely to become pregnant in the next few years are not noticeably more likely to say they would cancel travel to a Zika-prone region.

Members of this group are slightly less likely than those who aren't expecting a pregnancy in the next few years to say they wouldn't even reconsider their plans, but only by a few percentage points, as seen in the following graph:

Assuming that you had plans to visit on of the places where conditions for transmitting Zika are ideal later this year, would you:



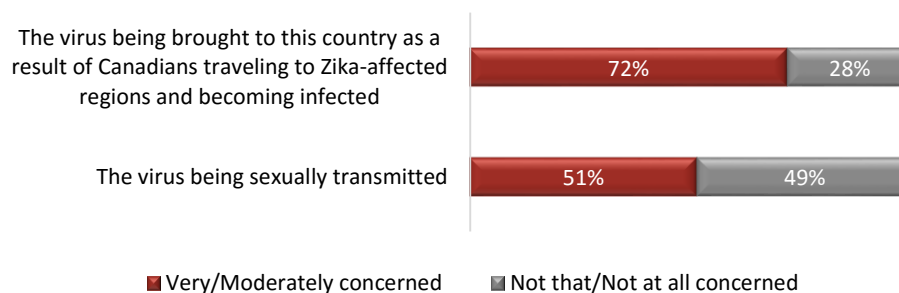
Moderate worries about Zika becoming a public health issue in Canada

Though Canada's climate insulates it from mosquito-borne Zika transmission within its borders, health agencies are still taking precautions to avoid the virus causing a public health crisis here. Canadian Blood Services, for example, recently announced [a three-week deferral period](#) for anyone wishing to donate blood who has traveled to a place where Zika is transmitted by mosquitoes locally.

Most of the Canadian public also expresses concern about the virus turning into a public health issue at home.

Roughly half of all Canadians (51%) are either "very" or "moderately" concerned about Zika spreading through the population via sexual contact, and almost three-quarters (72%) express this degree of worry about people traveling to infected regions and bringing the virus back with them:

How concerned would you say you are about Zika becoming a public health issue in Canada, either by:



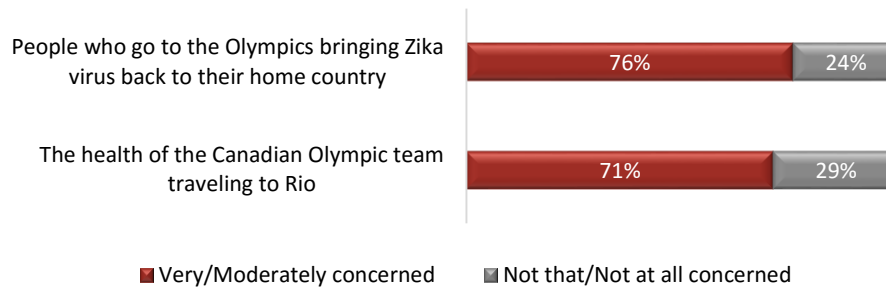
It should be noted that for each of these scenarios, those who describe themselves as "moderately concerned" significantly outnumber those who are very concerned. Women and older Canadians (those in the 55-plus age group) – and especially older women – are the demographic groups that express the greatest concern about Zika becoming a Canadian public health issue via either of these modes ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Most have concerns about people traveling to Brazil for the Olympics

With Brazil perhaps the country most severely affected by Zika so far, athletes and spectators alike [have been reconsidering their plans](#) to attend this summer's Olympic Games in Rio De Janeiro.

Most Canadians share these concerns, with seven-in-ten (71%) saying they're worried about the health of the Canadian Olympic team, and fully three-in-four (76%) saying they're at least moderately concerned about people going to Brazil for the Olympics and bringing Zika back to their home countries:

Brazil has been one of the countries most affected by Zika to date and it will also be hosting the 2016 Summer Olympics. How concerned are you about:



More than one-in-three Canadians (34%) say they're "very concerned" about Olympic visitors bringing Zika back to their home countries – a potential epidemic that has led [some to suggest](#) that the games should be postponed or moved, something [organizers have said they have no intention of doing](#).

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Assuming for a moment that you had plans to visit one of these places later this year, based on whatever you've seen or heard about this and on how you feel right now, would you:

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1508)	Awareness			
		Following and discussing with friends and family (265)	Seeing some coverage and having the odd conversation (626)	Just scanning the headlines (499)	Haven't seen or heard anything (118)
Cancel your travel plans to that area because of the Zika virus	25%	33%	22%	25%	29%
Reconsider but not rule it out	45%	41%	48%	43%	42%
Stick with your travel plans and still visit that region	30%	26%	30%	32%	29%

Assuming for a moment that you had plans to visit one of these places later this year, based on whatever you've seen or heard about this and on how you feel right now, would you:

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1508)	Household experience traveling to Zika-susceptible regions			
		Yes (Net) (475)	Yes, me (372)	Yes, someone else in my household (198)	No, no one (1033)
Cancel your travel plans to that area because of the Zika virus	25%	9%	6%	10%	33%
Reconsider but not rule it out	45%	41%	40%	41%	46%
Stick with your travel plans and still visit that region	30%	50%	54%	49%	21%

Assuming for a moment that you had plans to visit one of these places later this year, based on whatever you've seen or heard about this and on how you feel right now, would you:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1508)	Likelihood of pregnancy in the next few years	
		Likely (149)	Everyone else (includes unlikely, "not applicable," and "prefer not to say") (1359)
Cancel your travel plans to that area because of the Zika virus	25%	27%	25%
Reconsider but not rule it out	45%	49%	44%
Stick with your travel plans and still visit that region	30%	24%	31%