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## Zika Virus Opens up Abortion Debate in Americas

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The Zika virus, which has been shown to cause health defects in newborns, has put women and expectant mothers on alert, and opened up the abortion debate in several Latin American countries.

In Colombia – where over 13,500 cases of the Zika virus have been detected – officials have warned pregnant women to stay away from mosquito borne areas, as the virus is believed to cause microcephaly, a rare brain defect that causes abnormally small heads in newborns. Some governments have also warned women not to get pregnant, due to the extreme health risks for newborns, which have been met with extreme criticism by women's rights advocates.

[@jbarbassa](#) El Salvador women to avoid pregnancy bec of Zika, but heed strict anti-abortion law. You figure it out. via [@snolen](#)

These dangers, have also brought up an important debate in Colombia, which has been encouraged by women's rights organizations – whether women affected by the Zika virus should be allowed access to the abortion procedure, according to local media.

[@ArpiAppa](#) It should be lost on no one that El Salvador has a total ban on abortion while advising women not to get pregnant until 2018 due to [#Zika](#).

[@ArpiAppa](#) [#Zika](#) is affecting the countries with the most restrictive abortion laws and pervasive stigma. Safe and legal abortion is a right.

[@grimalkinnr](#) So I am watching [@AJAM](#) where they are reporting on the Zika virus. This is terrifying, especially in countries without legal abortion.

“Women should know that they can decide about their sexual and reproductive rights... Having a fetus with

microcephaly is a complication, and the woman can decide whether she wants to keep it or not. Her life matters as much as mental and economic health of women,” explained Silvia Plana, coordinator of the Bureau for the life and health of women, to Semana magazine.

Since 2006, abortion procedures have been authorized in Colombia but only under strict conditions, including cases of rape, if the woman's life is in jeopardy or in cases of a deformed fetus.

According to Plana, the fetus of women infected by the Zika virus should be considered “deformed” thus making the procedure lawful, at least in Colombia.

The World Health Organization reported Monday that cases of the mosquito borne Zika virus have been detected in every country in the Americas except Canada, and is expected to spread throughout the region.

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