How I Got Zika

By Krystal Alexander — June 27, 2016

You never think it can happen to you, until it does. I just spent the greater part of this morning being gently ridiculed by my colleagues here at the American Council on Science and Health. Why? One word: Zika.

I was in Jamaica last week to attend the wedding of a dear friend. I’d previously lived there for five years while I was pursuing my medical degree. Since I once lived there, I still consider myself a local when I visit, and like some local people do, my comfort level overruled my judgment. And now I have Zika.

You have probably used similar excuses, though likely not about Zika. “No need for this smelly bug spray” or “I lived here for years and never got Chikungunya, why would I get Zika?” or even, “It’s not like I’m planning to have a baby anytime soon.”

I was invincible. And I should have known better. Dare I admit I deserved every second of the mockery I received today? It’s the American Council on Science and Health, after all, we were way ahead of mainstream media on Zika. We were even first to suggest that focusing on mosquitoes in America is the wrong way to go, sexual transmission is more dangerous.

I had lots of rationalizations. Now I have Zika. I came into the office morning after I returned from Jamaica and by the end of the day I had a headache that, if asked to describe, would be similar to my brain oozing slowly out of my ear canals. Then came the general malaise. I brushed it off. By the time I got into bed that night the soreness started. The following day the headaches continued. I had chalked it up to a fleeting 24-hour bug. I’d feel better soon, I was sure of it. I took a nice warm shower thinking that was all I needed to revive me.

And that’s when I noticed it.

The rash.

A fine, red, maculo-papular rash spread across my abdomen. By the next day it had spread to my extremities and brought with it pruritus like I had never experienced in 29 years of life on earth.

At that point I began to level with myself. It’s probably Zika. Yes, I self-diagnose a lot, you can’t
help doing that after you've been to medical school. The next thing I did was to go to the ACSH website, type in "Zika" and start reading. The funny thing was, I had read all of these articles before, every single one of them. I knew the preventative measures I should have taken. I also knew I had chosen to ignore them.

We did our part early on, and continue to do so. As early as January [2] we had highlighted the severity of the virus that faces us now. I had read about its clinical features, consequences and complications [3] and I even knew how best to prevent the illness [4].

I was too cool for DEET. Now I am a Zika statistic. Don’t think it can’t happen to you.

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