

HEALTH ZIKA

More Women in Zika-Stricken Countries Are Seeking Abortions

Alexandra Sifferlin @acsifferlin | June 23, 2016

A new study shows that during the Zika virus outbreak, more women in countries where abortion is illegal have requested abortion medication

In countries hit hard by the ongoing [Zika outbreak](#), more women are seeking abortion options, [a new report](#) shows.

Abortion is illegal in many of the Latin American countries where Zika is spreading. But in the new report published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers analyzed data from the nonprofit [Women on Web](#) (WoW), an organization that connects women with restricted abortion access to doctors who can provide abortion medication.

Researchers looked at the number of women from 19 Latin American countries who contacted WoW to request abortion medications—the pills mifepristone and misoprostol, which are typically in combination—from January 2010 until March 2016. Their goal was to see if the number of requests changed once Zika became an issue and the link between Zika and birth defects like [microcephaly](#) emerged.

They did see a change. During that time, the researchers found that the orders spiked between 36% to 108%, depending on the country, in countries with ongoing Zika transmission where abortion is illegal, including Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras and Venezuela. Small increases in orders were also seen in Argentina and Peru, where abortion is also illegal but where there is not

ongoing Zika transmission.

While the researchers say they can't confirm that Zika is definitely the cause of the uptick for the countries, the number of women who said that Zika was the reason they were seeking abortion also increased.

Government warnings may also play a role in the rise. Requests for abortion increased significantly in Latin American countries where the governments issued warnings to pregnant women regarding Zika-related complications, though the researchers say that increase could be even larger in reality. "Our approach may underestimate the effect of the advisories on demand for abortion, since many women may have used an unsafe method, accessed misoprostol from local pharmacies or the black market, or visited local underground providers," the study authors write. "But accurate data on these choices are difficult to obtain."

A large number of pregnant women are infected with Zika worldwide. A [report on the situation in Colombia](#) recently revealed that around 12,000 pregnant women have been infected, and [well over 200 pregnant women in the U.S. have gotten Zika](#).



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