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ENVIRONMENT

AP Photo/Felipe Dana

Zika Is Making These Pregnant Women Turn to Desperate Measures

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By: Taylor Bell

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Thousands of pregnant women in Latin

America fearful of giving birth to children infected with [Zika virus](#) — which has been linked to birth defects like abnormally small heads and brains — are desperately reaching out for abortion services, the [Washington Post reports](#).

The situation for these women is particularly trying because abortion is largely banned in their home countries.

The Post Reports:

In more than a thousand emails to [Women on Web](#), a Canada-based group that provides advice and medication for women wanting an abortion in countries where it is banned, the women beg for the pills that are banned by law in their respective countries of Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru or El Salvador.



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Women on the Web's founder Dr. Rebecca Gromperts told the Washington Post that the number of Brazilian women contacting her organization has increased from "100

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during the first week of December (before the Zika outbreak became public) to 285 during the first week of February."

In many cases, the women are reaching out in vain. According to The Post, Brazilian customs officers have been blocking the delivery of abortion inducing pills sent by Women on the Web for years.



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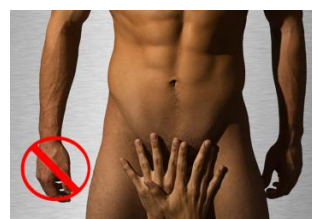
According to emails obtained by the Post, one Colombian woman wrote:

"I dare to write you because I'm a resident in Colombia and here the Zika virus is a major problem, although the health authorities haven't recognized it. I want to ask for help because I'm overcome by fear that my baby will be born sick. I already have two girls and work long and hard as a single mother to provide for them. Life in Bogotá is difficult enough without being in charge of a sick child, especially with the health system so precarious in Colombia."



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But for women in most Latin America countries — which are heavily influenced by the Catholic Church's staunch pro-life stance — getting an abortion can be very challenging. [According to Human Right's Watch](#), Latin American countries have some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world.

For instance, in [Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico](#) the government has outlawed [abortions](#) entirely except to preserve the mother's life. In fact, there are only four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean combined that freely allow women to obtain an abortion, no matter the reason.

Legality of Abortion in 2015

Countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean can be classified into six categories, according to the reasons for which abortion is legally permitted

| Reason | Country or territory |
|---|---|
| Prohibited altogether, or no explicit legal exception to save the life of a woman | Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Suriname |
| To save the life of a woman | Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil (a), Dominica, Guatemala, Mexico (a,d,g), Panama (a,d,f), Paraguay, Venezuela |
| To preserve physical health (and to save a woman's life)* | Argentina (a), Bahamas, Bolivia (a,c), Costa Rica, Ecuador (a), Grenada, Peru |
| To preserve mental health (and all of the above reasons) | Colombia (a,c,d), Jamaica (f), St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia (a,c), Trinidad and Tobago |
| Socioeconomic grounds (and all of the above reasons) | Barbados (a,c,d,f), Belize (d), St. Vincent and Grenadines (a,c,d) |
| Without restriction as to reason | Cuba (f), Guyana, Puerto Rico, Uruguay |

*Includes countries with laws that refer simply to "health" or "therapeutic" indications, which may be interpreted more broadly than physical health. Notes: Some countries also allow abortion in cases of (a) rape, (b) rape of a mentally disabled woman, (c) incest or (d) fetal impairment. Some countries restrict abortion by requiring (e) spousal authorization or (f) parental authorization. In Mexico, (g) the legality of abortion is determined at the state level, and the legal categorization listed here reflects the status for the majority of women. Countries that allow abortion on socio-economic grounds or without restriction as to reason have gestational limits (generally the first trimester); abortions may be permissible after the specified gestational age, but only on prescribed grounds. Source: Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), *The World's Abortion Laws 2015*, New York: CRR, 2015.

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As previously reported on [ATTN](#):, Pope Francis has suggested that it would be acceptable for women to use birth control to avoid becoming pregnant during the Zika outbreak. However, he emphasized that the Catholic Church still considers abortion an "absolute evil."

Meanwhile, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, a Vatican diplomat to the U.N., has emphasized that "a diagnosis of microcephaly [the condition linked to under-developed heads and brains] in a child should not warrant a death sentence."

WOMEN SUFFERING EXTRA BURDENS DURING ZIKA OUTBREAK

As noted by [Dame Magazine](#) contributor [Paula Young Lee](#), Zika Virus warnings have

placed the responsibility of avoiding pregnancy entirely on women:

"Rather than telling women to "avoid pregnancy" in the manner of avoiding a pothole, why are none of these assorted agencies telling men to stop having procreative sex until we know more about Zika? Why does the very suggestion of any government recommending men to practice abstinence for two years seem like a joke? The cultural reflex to hold women accountable for male lust and subsequent reproduction is so ingrained that we don't even notice the asymmetry."

SHARE YOUR OPINION

Do you think women with the Zika virus should be allowed to have an abortion?

YES

NO

Enter your email address

FINISH



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