

NEWS

Women are desperate for Zika abortions

By Yaron Steinbuch

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A woman who is seven months pregnant is seen in front of her house in Recife, Brazil, on Feb. 8.

Photo: Reuters

Pregnant women in Latin America who are scared of giving birth to babies disabled by the mosquito-borne Zika virus are clamoring for abortion pills — which are mostly illegal in their countries.

Some of the mothers say they've already tested positive for Zika, while others express fears of contracting the disease that has been linked to microcephaly, which causes undersize heads and brain damage.

The women from countries like Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and El Salvador have been sending hundreds of emails to Women on Web, a Canada-based group for women seeking abortions in countries where it is banned, the Washington Post reported.

Laws against abortion differ from country to country — with El Salvador banning it outright, including for cases of rape and incest, while others, such as Colombia, permit it when a fetus displays signs of a severe deformity.

The Zika outbreak has sparked fierce debate in the predominantly Catholic countries, but desperate women aren't waiting for laws to be changed and are pleading for pills from Women on Web.

The group — which has been sending Mifepristone and Misoprostol to women around the world for over 10 years — was founded in 2005 by Dr. Rebecca Gomperts, a Dutch doctor.

The number of Brazilian women contacting Women on Web has nearly tripled — from 100 in the first week of December, before the outbreak became public, to 285 in the first week of February.

“When Zika hit the news we saw an [immediate] increase in the number of requests from countries that are affected by Zika,” she told the Washington Post. “We think that is related to the Zika outbreak. We cannot explain it any other way.

“Probably a lot of women are looking for abortion services now. Women that are pregnant and suspect that they have had Zika and they just don’t want to take the risks of having a microcephalic baby,” she said. “Our worry is that these women will turn to unsafe abortion methods, while we can help them with a safe, medical abortion.”

Gomperts shared some of the anguished emails with the paper.

“I am [name redacted],” begins one email. “I contacted Zika 4 days ago. I just found out I’m about 6 weeks pregnant. Today. Today, I found out I’m pregnant. I have a son I love dearly. I love children. But I dont believe it is a wise decision to keep a baby who will suffer. I need an abortion. I don’t know who to turn to. Please help me ASAP.”

Many of the pregnant women said they had tested positive for the disease but could not travel or get abortion pills.



A 2-month-old baby born with microcephaly in Recife, Brazil.

Photo: Reuters



Brazilian soldiers pass out pamphlets on the Zika virus on Copacabana beach on Feb. 13.

Photo: Getty Images

“I contracted Zika and cannot leave the country!” wrote one woman who sought pills.

Another woman said she managed to obtain Misoprostol on the black market but was unsure how to take the drug.

Other women said they hadn’t been tested and a few said they didn’t trust their doctors’ diagnosis.

One woman said she had shown the symptoms — rash, fever and diarrhea — three weeks into her pregnancy.

But by the time she saw a doctor, the symptoms had gone and the doctor said it wasn’t Zika. But she didn’t trust the doctor and was scared for her baby.

“In my mind, I can’t forget about the symptoms and the consequences that they might cause,” she wrote in Spanish. “What can I do?”

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