Level 1: Watch (Practice Usual Precautions)
Carnival and Mardi Gras

Thousands of people around the world celebrate Carnival every year. Some of the most popular Carnival celebrations take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Nice, France; Venice, Italy; Cologne, Germany; Quebec, Canada; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Trinidad and Tobago. Carnival dates vary by destination, but for many, the celebration starts the Friday before the beginning of Lent (Ash Wednesday). The last day of celebration is called Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday." In 2016, Carnival festivities at many destinations reach their height from Saturday, February 6, through Tuesday, February 9. Most Carnival parties are characterized by indulgence and excess — eating, drinking, and dancing the night away.

Most people participate in Carnival and Mardi Gras to have fun, but these festivities are also associated with certain health risks, primarily from crime, excessive drinking, unsafe food, risky sex, and heat-related illness. Malaria and other tropical diseases may also be common, depending on the country. Many destinations in South and Central America and the Caribbean, including Brazil, are experiencing an outbreak of Zika virus. Because of reports of serious birth defects in babies whose mothers were infected with Zika virus during pregnancy, CDC has issued special recommendations for pregnant women traveling to areas with ongoing transmission and issued a Level 2 Travel Alert (Practice Enhanced Precautions) for those areas. See “Zika Virus in Pregnancy” on this page for more information about the risks associated with Zika virus infection and the Zika Travel Information page to find out which countries are included in the travel alert.

Zika Virus in Pregnancy
(Interim Recommendations)

Zika virus can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with Zika virus while pregnant. Knowledge of the link between Zika and these outcomes is evolving, but until more is known, CDC recommends special precautions for the following groups:

- Women who are pregnant (in any trimester):
  - Consider postponing travel to any area where Zika virus transmission is ongoing.
  - If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your doctor first and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

- Women who are trying to become pregnant:
  - Before you travel, talk to your doctor about your plans to become pregnant and the risk of Zika virus infection.
  - Strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.

Specific areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing are often difficult to determine and are likely to change over time. As more information becomes available, the travel notices for Zika will be updated. Please check back frequently for the most up-to-date recommendations.
What can travelers do to stay healthy and safe during Carnival?

If you plan to travel outside the United States to celebrate Carnival, you can take some simple precautions to help you stay safe and healthy.

**Before your trip:**

- Schedule an appointment before you depart on your trip. Talk to your doctor or nurse about vaccines and medicines recommended for your destination and any associated travel alerts. Travelers who want to reduce their risk of seasonal flu should receive the flu vaccine before the trip. See the Travel Clinics webpage for help in finding a travel medicine clinic near you.
- Consider travel health and medical evacuation insurance.
- Pack a travel health kit.
- Research your destination, including local laws, customs, and culture. For example, it is illegal for anyone in Trinidad and Tobago to wear military or camouflage clothing. People dressed in camouflage risk being detained and having the garments confiscated.
- Monitor travel warnings and alerts from the US Department of State.
- Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).
- Leave a copy of your itinerary, contact information, credit cards, and passport with someone at home.

**During your trip:**

- **Follow security and safety guidelines.** Travelers may be targets for criminals during mass gatherings.
  - If possible, don't travel at night, avoid questionable areas, and travel with a companion.
  - If you drink alcohol, do it in moderation. Drunk people are more likely to hurt themselves or other people, engage in risky sex, or get arrested.
  - Carry a photocopy of your passport and entry stamp; leave the actual passport securely in your hotel.
  - Carry the contact information for the nearest US embassy or consulate and the emergency service numbers for your destination.
  - Follow all local laws and social customs.
  - Do not wear expensive clothing or jewelry.
  - Always keep hotel doors locked, and store valuables in secure areas.
  - If possible, choose hotel rooms between the second and sixth floors, due to security and fire safety reasons.

- **Prevent mosquito bites and use insect repellent.** Diseases spread by mosquitoes, such as malaria, dengue, Zika, and chikungunya, are common throughout tropical and
subtropical regions. Read more about ways to prevent bug bites by visiting the Avoid Bug Bites page. You may also need to take prescription medicine to protect against malaria. Talk to your doctor or nurse about prevention steps that are right for you and your destination. See the Travel Notice webpage for specific outbreaks by location.

- CDC recommends that pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas with Zika outbreaks. Learn more in the “Zika Virus in Pregnancy” section on this page.

- **Follow food and water safety guidelines.** Eating contaminated food and drinking contaminated water can cause illnesses such as hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and travelers’ diarrhea. Read about how to prevent these diseases by visiting the Safe Food and Water page. Beware of food from street vendors, ice in drinks, and other foods and drinks that may be contaminated and cause travelers’ diarrhea. Download our free app, “Can I Eat This?” to help you make safe food and water choices during your trip.

- **Follow guidelines for hot climates.** Dehydration and heat-related illnesses are common during Carnival in tropical countries or the Southern Hemisphere, where February and March are summer months. Drink plenty of (bottled!) water, keep cool, and wear sunscreen. Read more about how to prevent these conditions by visiting the Travel to Hot Climates and Sun Exposure pages.

- **Reduce your risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).** The “anything goes” atmosphere of many Carnival celebrations can encourage travelers to engage in risky sex, especially if alcohol or drugs are involved. Carry condoms that you purchased in the United States and that have been stored appropriately. Read more about how to prevent these conditions by visiting the Traveler STD page.

- **Choose safe transportation.** *Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of healthy US citizens in foreign countries.* Read about ways to prevent transportation injuries by visiting the Road Safety page.

- **Reduce your exposure to germs.** Wash your hands often, and avoid contact with people who are sick. Read more about reducing your exposure to germs in the Stay Healthy and Safe section of the destination page.

- **If you feel sick during your trip:**
  - Talk to a doctor or nurse if you feel seriously ill, especially if you have a fever.
For more information about medical care abroad, see Getting Health Care Abroad.

Avoid contact with other people while you are sick.

After your trip:

- If you are not feeling well after your trip, you may need to see a doctor. If you need help finding a travel medicine specialist, see Find a Clinic. Be sure to tell your doctor about your travel, including where you went and what you did on your trip. Also, tell your doctor if you were bitten or scratched by an animal or insect while traveling.
- If your doctor prescribed antimalarial medicine for your trip, keep taking the rest of your pills after you return home. If you stop taking your medicine too soon, you could still get sick.
- **Malaria is always a serious disease and may be deadly.** If you become ill with a fever either while traveling in a malaria-risk area or for up to 1 year after you return home, you should seek immediate medical attention and tell the doctor about your travel history.
- **If you are pregnant and have traveled to an area with a Zika outbreak, talk to your doctor about your recent travel.** CDC has issued guidance to help doctors decide when to test you and your baby for Zika virus.
- See your healthcare provider if you are pregnant and developed a fever, rash, joint pain, or red eyes during your trip or within 2 weeks after traveling to a country where Zika virus cases have been reported.
- For more information, see Getting Sick after Travel.