Zika is a viral disease spread most commonly by Aedes mosquitoes. Zika is usually very mild, but can cause serious birth defects if a woman is infected while pregnant. The Aedes spp. are not native to California, but you should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites while travelling for research projects, study abroad programs, vacations and the Summer Olympics in Brazil.

How is Zika spread?
Zika is mainly spread to people by the bite of infected Aedes aegypti or Aedes albopictus mosquitoes, both of which have been found throughout the US and California. Zika is also known to be spread via sex and maybe blood.

What are its symptoms?
Only about 20% of those infected with Zika will actually get sick, with symptoms usually going away within a week. It may take 3-7 days for the symptoms to appear, which include fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes. Some reports link Zika to Guillain-Barré Syndrome, which causes nerve damage, but the connection has not been confirmed.

What should I do if I’m infected?
If you are experiencing symptoms within 2 weeks of returning from an area where Zika occurs, contact the Engemann or Eric Cohen Student Health Centers, or your healthcare provider, and let them know of your recent trip. To prevent possible spread of the virus into Southern California, avoid areas where mosquitoes are typically found.

Can Zika be prevented or treated?
There is no vaccine to treat Zika, but plenty of rest and fluids can help treat the symptoms. You can protect yourself against Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses by wearing long clothing and using insect repellent. Also, since Zika can be spread via sex and blood, use condoms if you or your partner may have been exposed to Zika, and don’t donate blood for 4 weeks after exposure.

What should I do if I’m pregnant?
Zika is known to cause microcephaly (small head and brain) and other serious brain, eye or hearing problems in the fetus if a woman is infected while pregnant. Because of these severe effects, the CDC recommends that pregnant women avoid travelling to areas where Zika occurs. Contact your healthcare provider if you have any concerns.

What should I know before traveling?
Many areas around the world have recorded incidents and outbreaks of Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases such as Chikungunya, Dengue and Malaria. Research your destination, talk to your healthcare provider about possible prophylactic treatments or vaccinations, and always bring EPA-registered insect repellents with you, just in case effective repellents are not available where you are going.