

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Child In Hawaii Born With Birth Defect Linked To Zika Virus

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According to the Associated Press, health officials say a baby born in a Hawaii hospital is the first in the U.S. with a birth defect linked to the Zika virus -- a tropical illness currently found in Latin American and Caribbean countries, including U.S. territory Puerto Rico. The Center for Disease Control on Tuesday issued a [major advisory for pregnant women](#), urging them not to travel to regions being affected by the disease, and guidelines to follow to best protect themselves and their unborn children if travel to said locations is unavoidable.

The Hawaii state Department of Health said the baby's mother likely contracted the disease while living in Brazil last year and passed it on while her child was in the womb.

The Zika virus, originally identified in 1947 from Zika forest of Uganda, is transmitted to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. These mosquitoes are found throughout tropical regions of the world and are the same mosquitoes that spread dengue and Chikungunya viruses. Mosquitoes become infected with the Zika virus when they feed on a person already infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to other people through bites, and there is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika virus infection.

Zika was confirmed in a resident of Puerto Rico with no known travel history. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working closely with the Puerto Rico Department of Health to investigate how the patient may have contracted the virus.

Outbreaks of Zika have occurred in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Because the *Aedes* species mosquitoes that spread Zika virus are found throughout the world, it is likely that outbreaks will spread to new countries. To date, Zika virus has been reported in several countries and territories in the Americas. But in 2015 the disease made the leap to the Western Hemisphere, affecting more than a million people in Brazil. It's since spread to Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and nine other countries, according to VOX Media. Brazil is also investigating the possible association between Zika virus infection and cases of microcephaly (smaller than expected head size) in infants.

The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting from several days to a week. Infection is thought to provide lifelong immunity. Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon. Deaths are rare. Travelers returning from areas with Zika activity should seek medical care if they experience a fever and symptoms of infection. Healthcare providers in areas with reported cases should be on the alert for possible cases.