

The Virgin Islands Consortium

D.O.H. Will Go 'Door-To-Door' In 'Affected Areas' To Fight Zika; Update On Infected Expected 'Any Day'

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ST. CROIX -- Following the World Health Organization's declaration of the Zika virus as [an international emergency](#), the Virgin Islands Department of Health, through a press release issued late Monday, said it would be going "door-to-door" in "affected areas" to combat the disease. Above, a specialist fumigates the Nueva Esperanza graveyard located on the outskirts of Brazil.

That's according to Juan Figueroa-Serville, who still serves as acting commissioner of D.O.H. along with Dr. Michelle Davis. According to Mr. Figueroa-Serville, residents should take all necessary measures to protect themselves.

"We at the Department of Health are read willing and able to serve the people of the Virgin Islands. We will be going door to door in the affected areas, providing mosquito larvacide, information and assistance in the wake of this virus. I am asking all Virgin Islanders to take precautionary measures to protect yourselves and your families and in the event that you experience any symptoms, please see your physician immediately," he said.

Dr. Davis said the declaration means that the territory will receive more assistance from the federal government. "This declaration by the WHO will afford the territory additional resources. These resources include, but are not limited to staffing, supplies additional testing and educational assistance," she said.

Deputy Commissioner of Health Kimberly Jones told The Consortium this morning that while no new cases have been reported in the territory, D.O.H. was awaiting results from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She said residents with symptoms of the virus had been admitted to emergency rooms, clinics and private doctors' offices, and that D.O.H. had collected specimen and sent them to the C.D.C. for testing at no cost to those patients or their physicians. "We are expecting results any day," she added.

At a news conference in Geneva, Dr. Margaret Chan, the director general of the W.H.O., said that clusters of microcephaly in regions with Zika cases "constitute an extraordinary event and a public health threat to other parts of the world."

She added that "international reponse is needed to minimize the threat in infected countries and reduce risk of international spread." Dr. Chan said case control studies on the connection between Zika and microcephaly will start in two weeks.

The outbreak of Zika, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, began in Brazil last May and has since moved into more than 20 countries in Latin America. Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Americans, specifically pregnant women, from traveling to the territory, even though there has been only one confirmed case here.

The main worry is over the Zika's possible link to microcephaly, a condition that causes babies to be born with brain damage and unusually small heads. Reported cases of microcephaly are rising sharply in Brazil, however, researchers have yet to establish a direct link.

Governor Kenneth Mapp [said on Friday](#) that he had mobilized various government department and agencies, led by the D.O.H. to curtail the spread of the disease in the territory.

"We are extremely fortunate to have the assistance and leadership of Dr. Davis, who is a true expert in this area," the governor said.

Ms. Jones, who has helped coordinate prevention efforts, said additional resources are being directed to mosquito eradication, as well to boosting education initiatives. Public information campaigns are expected to ramp up in the coming days and information will be disseminated in schools, workplaces and at large events such as the upcoming Agriculture Fair on St. Croix.

The Friday release further stated that enforcement officers from D.O.H., the Waste Management Authority, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs temporarily assigned to the Virgin Islands Police Department would be allowed to return to their posts following the expiration of an executive order that lasted until January 31, 2016.

“These officers will be visiting neighborhoods throughout the territory to assist in eradication efforts, but we are also calling on every Virgin Islander to do their part,” Ms. Jones said. “Get rid of any standing water in and around your homes and help your friends and family members do the same. Report stagnant water to the Department of Health that is too big for you to handle such as an abandoned cistern or pool.”

Ms. Jones also urged Virgin Islanders to protect themselves from bites as best they can with clothing and repellents. She said those with symptoms similar to those found with the Zika virus should see a healthcare provider. D.O.H. in conjunction with the CDC continues to test specimens from suspected cases of the virus at no cost to residents, stated the release.

D.O.H. has also distributed approximately 3000 mosquito nets focusing their efforts on pregnant women, who doctors believe are at greatest risk from exposure to Zika. And officials at the department have conducted healthcare provider training sessions in both the St. Thomas/St. John and the St. Croix districts. Training has been conducted with emergency room staff at the Roy L. Schneider Hospital on St. Thomas and the Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix to help them recognize suspected cases.

Additionally, a comprehensive training session was conducted with the entire staff of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, as its personnel often come in contact with potential mosquito breeding grounds around bins and other disposal sites.

“I want our residents and our visitors to rest assured we are taking all possible steps to combat this virus and we will continue to keep the public informed with regular updates,” Ms. Jones said.