

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Zika Update: Agricultural Fair Grounds In 'Good Shape,' Health Officials Say, C.D.C. Sends Epidemiologist To Help Territory

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Department of Health revealed late Wednesday that D.O.H. officials have inspected the Agricultural Fair grounds, located in Estate Lower Love, and said that the grounds are in "good shape and do not pose a threat for mosquito propagation," as thousands of residents and visitors prepare to descend on St. Croix for the annual fair from February 13-15. Above, 2015 Agrifest activities.

Even so, Department of Health Acting Commissioner Juan Figueroa-Serville said nearby farmers should take the extra step of cleaning up their fields as a matter of extra caution.

"At the same time, individuals engaged in farming on properties adjacent to the Ag Fair grounds are advised to clean up their properties as inspectors have observed accumulations of trash, old appliances old tires standing water, all of which can breed mosquitoes and then fly to the Ag Fair Grounds," Mr. Figueroa-Serville said. "D.O.H. inspectors and Health Enforcement officers will be out during the Ag Fair and will be issuing citations. Farmers are urged to be vigilant in removing debris and other items which could breed mosquitoes. We are urging everyone in the community to work together to protect our pregnant women and unborn children from the Zika virus," he added.

D.O.H. also made known that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has provided the territory with additional assistance to fight the "initial stage" of the Zika virus by providing epidemiologist Jay Roth.

According to the release, Mr. Roth will be working hand-in-hand with Dr. Esther Ellis, the territorial epidemiologist, collecting samples and working with the C.D.C. to curtail the rapidly spreading virus.

And the department said it is offering free Zika virus testing at its clinics, and residents are asked to take advantage of the service.

The outbreak of Zika, which is transmitted by mosquitoes and also through [sexual intercourse](#), began in Brazil last May and has since moved into more than 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 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. However, Deputy Commissioner of Health Kimberly Jones told The Consortium on Tuesday that while no new cases had been reported in the territory, D.O.H. was awaiting results from C.D.C. 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.

The main worry is over the Zika virus' 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.