

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Puerto Rico Declares State Of Emergency; Places Price Freeze On Condoms As 22 Are Said To Be Infected With Zika

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ST. CROIX -- Sitting just 186 kilometers away from the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico health officials have declared a state of emergency in the island commonwealth, as the Zika virus has reportedly infected 22 residents there.

Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla said on Friday that federal authorities were helping develop an education campaign and prevention strategies. He said the government froze prices on condoms following confirmed cases of the virus being [sexually transmitted in Texas](#). A price freeze was also ordered for products needed to curtail the spread of the

disease, according to government officials.

In a press release issued on Friday, Senator Marvin Blyden said Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Ester Ellis confirmed that over 14 samples from the territory were sent to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) to test for Zika. Deputy Commissioner of Health, Kimberly Jones, said results should be received soon.

World Health Organization recently [declared](#) Zika an international public health emergency; an infrequent decision caused by growing concern that it could cause birth defects.

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

“We at the Department of Health are ready 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.

At a recent news conference in Geneva, Switzerland, 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 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](#) recently 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.

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