

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Health Officials Awaiting C.D.C. Virgin Islands Zika Update; Says D.O.H. Has Resources For Effective Response

VIC News / **Published On February 10, 2016 12:10 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Deputy Commissioner of Health Kimberly Jones told The Consortium this morning that Virgin Islands Department of Health (D.O.H.) officials were still awaiting samples sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C), to determine whether there were any new cases of the Zika virus -- a tropical disease that may lead to babies being born with abnormally small heads -- since the [first case was announced](#) on January 22.

But if the results were return with new cases, D.O.H. officials said they were prepared - buttressed by C.D.C. aid -- to combat the disease.

“Our constant communication with the CDC has allowed us to pool our resources to provide the most effective preventative care for the Territory, in expectation of the Zika virus’s impact,” said Dr. Michelle Davis, the U.S. Department of Health Human Services' Regional Health Administrator and the territory's acting D.O.H. commissioner. “I appreciate the assistance and the potential continued support. The CDC’s initial response in sending us an additional Epidemiologist; Jay Roth had been extremely welcomed. In addition, Ms. Darcie Bentz who has been assigned by CDC will be providing administrative support to our programs and we are grateful to have her assistance. Senior Leadership will continue to update the outreach guidelines as this situation continues to develop.”

Another Acting D.O.H. Commissioner, Juan Figueroa-Serville, highlighted the department's ongoing and upcoming Zika virus-combating initiatives.

“The Home Visitation Program under our Maternal and Child Healthcare clinic will be at the Tutu Park Mall on Wednesday, February 10, 2016 from 9:00 Am to 12:00 noon to distribute mosquito nets to the pregnant women. Department of Health staff will also be onsite to distribute insect repellent and educational material.

"Then on Thursday, February, 11, 2016 they will be at K-Mart at Lockhart Gardens to also distribute mosquito nets to the pregnant women, and insect repellent and educational materials. As always, the Department of Health will have a presence at the St Croix Agricultural fairgrounds this coming weekend, where we will be providing outreach, education and answering yours questions about this threat. We are urging everyone in the community to work together to protect our pregnant women and unborn children from the Zika virus.”

The outbreak of Zika, which is transmitted by mosquitoes and sex, began in Brazil last May and has since moved into more than 20 countries in Latin America. The C.D.C. recently 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.