

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. of Health Sends 120 Samples To C.D.C. For Zika Virus Testing; Mapp Meets With Feds To Discuss Action Plan

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp met with federal officials on Wednesday to discuss what Government House calls "proactive measures" to fight the Zika virus. The meeting comes as the territory's Department of Health (D.O.H.) revealed that Dr. Esther Ellis, the territory's epidemiologist, had sent 120 samples to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) for Zika testing.

According to the release, while D.O.H. has lead Zika prevention efforts, Governor Mapp has pledged a "multi-agency approach," and has asked the departments of Planning &

Natural Resources, Education, Public Works and the Housing Authority to join the fight.

Judith Enck, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region II Administrator, said that Washington remains committed to assisting the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Environmental Protection Agency regulates pesticides and is working closely with C.D.C. to develop protocols to help deter Zika's spread. She said screened windows, mosquito nets, repellents and protective clothing were the best defenses at this time.

"The C.D.C. is not recommending widespread pesticide spraying," she said.

Ms. Enck told the governor that his administration should put together a list of what is most needed to battle the virus here in the territory as \$200 million had been set aside by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to assist local governments. Mr. Mapp requested that tire shredders be included on the list as improperly disposed tires remain prime breeding grounds for the mosquitoes that carry the Zika virus. Ms. Enck agreed that working to get rid of the territory's tire piles would go a long way toward reducing the mosquito population.

The federal government has already provided D.O.H. with mosquito netting and four C.D.C. emergency operation personnel to assist in diagnosing suspected Zika cases and better informing the public.

Housing & Urban Development officials also participated in Wednesday's meeting, and are working to ensure that the territory's 6,000 public housing units are better protected (many currently lack window screens and have standing water on site). Ms. Enck also called on local agencies to look for leaking pipes where water may puddle.

The territory's leader expressed concern that efforts made to eradicate the virus must include the British Virgin Islands; as mosquitoes did not have far to travel.

"St. John is right across the street from the B.V.I.," he reminded. "We have to involve them as well as pivotal private sector partners."

D.O.H. is offering free mosquito nets to pregnant women. The nets may be picked up at the Maternal Child Health Clinic on St. Thomas, the Morris de Castro Clinic on St. John, and the Charles Harwood Medical Complex on St. Croix.