

The Virgin Islands Consortium

C.D.C. Investigating 14 Cases Of Zika Transmitted Through Sex In U.S.

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United States health officials on Tuesday said they were investigating 14 new reports of the Zika virus possibly being transmitted by sex, including two pregnant women. If confirmed, the unexpectedly high number would have major implications for controlling the virus, which is usually spread by mosquito bites.

Scientists had believed sexual transmission of Zika to be extremely rare, and have documented [only a few cases](#).

“We were surprised that there was this number,” Dr. Anne Schuchat, the deputy director at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in an interview. “If a number of

them pan out, that's much more than I was expecting.”

Dr. Schuchat stressed that only two of the infections have been confirmed, and that the information is still preliminary. However, should the suspected cases be confirmed as genuine Zika cases, the situation would open a new complexity to the mystery surrounding Zika.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, [there are only 2 confirmed cases of the virus](#), but according to the territory's Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis, that number is expected to increase.

The latest case was confirmed to be a 42-year-old male living in St. Croix. Dr. Ellis learned of the new case late Thursday, and the information was transmitted to the Department of Health on Friday morning, according to D.O. H. Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Jones.

“This means that we have mosquitoes here that are infected with the Zika virus and are transmitting it to others. One additional case doubles our case count so it is significant, and we do have quite a few labs pending, so we do anticipate that we will be getting more positives in the future,” Dr. Ellis said.

Aside from causing babies to be born with shrunken, misshapen heads — a deformity known as microcephaly — [researchers now say](#) that even infants who appear normal at birth may be at higher risk for mental illnesses later in life if their mothers were infected during pregnancy.

In addition to the two confirmed cases, in four others the preliminary evidence suggests Zika, but the virus has not been confirmed, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials, speaking on Tuesday. The eight other cases are still being investigated. In all the cases, women in the continental United States had sex with men who had traveled to countries where the virus is circulating and the travelers reported symptoms within two weeks of the onset of their non-traveling female partner's symptoms, C.D.C. officials said.

C.D.C. Medical Doctor Dan Baden told The Consortium on Thursday that there was no evidence that women can transmit Zika virus to their sex partners, but added that more research is needed.