

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Five Additional Cases Of Zika Virus Confirmed In Territory; Two Pregnant Women Infected

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Health on Tuesday confirmed five new cases of Zika virus in the territory, with two of the individuals infected being pregnant women. The new cases bring the total so far to 21, with 15 in St. Croix, five in St. Thomas and the first case in St. John.

"These continued increases in Zika cases in the U.S.V.I. are concerning, especially for pregnant women, women of childbearing age, and their partners," Commissioner Nominee, Dr. Michelle Davis stated in response to the updated report. "Given unknown health effects of this virus, it is important for pregnant women to protect themselves against Zika and to take advantage of the services offered by the Department of Health

to prevent infection.”

Pregnant women infected with Zika can pass the virus on to her unborn baby, which can cause serious birth defects. To date 541 pregnant women in the U.S.V.I. have been tested for Zika, with three confirmed positives.

D.O.H. said it's working diligently to protect the territory's next generation from these health effects by offering the following free services to pregnant women:

- Zika testing;
- Inspections to look for mosquito larvae and mosquito breeding grounds at/around her house;
- Larvicide treatment if mosquito larvae are found at/around her house;
- Zika Prevention Kit, which includes educational materials, insect repellent, permethrin spray repellent for clothing, condoms to avoid sexual transmission of Zika, treatment tabs for preventing mosquitoes from breeding in standing water, and a bed net.

To find a testing location or receive any of these services, pregnant women are encouraged to contact the Department of Health Emergency Operations Center at (340) 712-6205 or visit www.healthvi.org. In addition to pregnant women, anyone with symptoms of Zika (fever, rash, joint pain, or red eyes) is also eligible for a free Zika test.

“Free Zika testing is available at several locations to pregnant women and anyone with symptoms of the virus. If you are turned away from testing or are told to pay for testing please call the Department of Health Emergency Operations Center,” warned Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Jones. “The D.O.H. has agreements in place with several facilities and you should not be charged for Zika testing at these specific clinics, labs, and hospitals.”

Zika is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected *Aedes* species mosquito. The most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week after being bitten by an infected mosquito. People usually don't get sick enough to go to the hospital, and they very rarely die of Zika. For this reason, many people might not realize they have been infected.

People can take the following steps to prevent getting Zika: wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, stay in places with air conditioning and window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside, use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or para-menthane-diol.

For local information about Zika, call the Department of Health Emergency Operations Center at (340) 712-6205. For more general information about the Zika virus call toll free: 1-800-CDC-INFO.