

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Health Watch: Three New Cases Of Zika Hit St. Thomas

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ST. CROIX -- Department of Health reported three new cases of the Zika virus in the territory this week, with all three cases affecting St. Thomas. The new numbers break a [three-week streak](#) without any new cases.

And Tuesday's report brings the territory's total Zika cases to 24: 15 in St. Croix, 8 in St. Thomas and 1 in St. John. D.O.H. expressed relief that the new cases did not affect pregnant women.

"The increase in Zika cases in the Virgin Islands are very concerning; however, we are relieved that none of the new cases include pregnant women," said D.O.H. Commissioner Dr. Michelle Davis. "We the Department of Health have been vigilant in

educating the public, providing free testing to individuals exhibiting symptoms as well as free inspections, larvicide treatments and Zika Prevention Kits for pregnant women; 600 Zika kits have been distributed territory wide.”

Dr. Davis also outlined several future plans to support the departments Zika response: "At D.O.H. we will continue to emphasize the importance of protecting oneself and their loved ones from the possible devastating health effects of this virus and encourage our residents to take advantage of the free services offered by the Department of Health."

Zika is spread 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 or may be infected and have no symptoms. Zika can also be spread sexually.

For pregnant women and their unborn children, the consequences are much more severe. Pregnant women infected with Zika can pass the virus on to their unborn baby, which can cause a serious birth defect called microcephaly that is marked by smaller-than-normal heads and brains. This, in turn, can lead to long-lasting mental disabilities.

The DOH is working diligently to protect USVI'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.

“At the Department of Health, we are committed to protecting pregnant women and their babies from the health effects of Zika,” said Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Jones. “If you are a pregnant woman, we strongly encourage you to get tested either at the Department of Health or at one of the [15 clinics](#) across the islands we have partnered with to offer free Zika testing to pregnant women and anyone exhibiting signs of the virus.”

“If pregnant women face any challenges getting tested at any of the free Zika testing locations listed on the [DOH website](#), call our Emergency Operations Center and we will connect you immediately to the appropriate testing services,” Ms. Jones added.

Zika testing is also available free of charge to anyone exhibiting signs of infection, such as fever, rash, joint pain, or red eyes.

D.O.H. representatives also stress that there are simple steps everyone can take to protect themselves and their families by following the 4 Ds:

- Dress – wear protective clothing – long sleeves, long pants and light colors
- Drain – get rid of water containers in and around your home
- Defend – use repellent on exposed skin and treat clothes with one of several EPA-approved repellents
- Discuss – spread the word about the simple things you can do to make a difference

To support its response to the Zika virus, D.O.H. is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to strengthen efforts to track the outbreak, enhance laboratory services for faster testing results and get the word out about how you can protect yourself against Zika, according to the release.

For local information about the Zika virus, to have an expert come out to your group or organization to share more about Zika or to receive any of the Department of Health's free services, call the Department of Health Emergency Operations Center at (340) 712-6205 or visit [www.healthvi.org](http://www.healthvi.org). For more general information about the Zika virus call toll free: 1-800-CDC-INFO.