

The Virgin Islands Consortium

C.D.C. Pushing Puerto Rico To Ramp Up Aerial Spraying To Fight Zika As Virus Rapidly Spreads

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The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) said last Wednesday that the Zika virus was spreading fast in Puerto Rico, and that the island needed to accelerate its aerial bug-killing efforts because Zika is spreading on its own there and could start infecting dozens of pregnant women per day -- raising the possibility of widespread Zika-associated birth defects.

"Multiple independent data sources indicate that at current trends, thousands of pregnant women in Puerto Rico will catch Zika," C.D.C. Director Tom Frieden said in a statement.

Over 30 cases have been reported in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a far cry from Puerto Rico's more than 1,726, a number that includes 191 pregnant women. But one of Puerto Rico's closest neighbors is the U.S. Virgin Islands, with thousands of people traveling between the islands monthly.

According to the C.D.C., aerial spraying is a safe and proven approach to tackle mosquitoes that transmit diseases, such as Zika, dengue and chikungunya.

The Zika virus epidemic is one of many problems affecting Puerto Rico. Congress recently approved a measure aimed at helping the commonwealth's government restructure its \$72 billion total debt so it could manage payments. The virus has also caused problems in P.R.'s health industry, as healthcare facilities there have had to deal with an overload of residents who have fallen ill and are seeking treatment.

The C.D.C. said it would help the island set up the type of mosquito control unit that vulnerable parts of the U.S. mainland have, while spending \$500,000 to help Puerto Ricans dispose of old tires where mosquitoes breed.

Feature Image: Stagnant water in a canal in San Juan. Standing water is a major breeding ground for mosquitoes that carry the Zika virus. (Credit Victor J. Blue for The New York Times)