

The Virgin Islands Consortium

D.O.H. Reports 15 New Cases Of The Zika Virus In Territory; Majority In St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Health late Wednesday revealed that 15 new cases of the Zika virus has been recorded in the territory through D.O.H.'s weekly surveillance report. The increase sees most cases affecting St. Thomas, as the island's count has drastically overtaken that of St. Croix, with 29 cases here and 18 on the Big Island -- bringing the territory's total to 47.

"This increase was expected based on how other mosquito borne outbreaks have occurred. For example, the number of Chikungunya cases continued to rise and reached its highest level at about eight months," Health Commissioner Michelle Davis said concerning the spike. "The Department of Health is working closely with the other

territories as well as the Federal Government, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to provide the educational outreach and personal protection information and free services to the Virgin Islands Community.

"This week the majority of new cases occurred on St. Thomas, potential reasons include St. Thomas being more densely populated and having a higher number of residents. Furthermore, the USVI adheres to the reporting requirement of the CDC; other jurisdictions in the Caribbean may have different reporting requirements and thus we may not know the actual number of cases in those areas," she said.

In light of the spike, D.O.H. may need to consider aerial spraying to prevent a drastic increase of the virus in the territory -- [an action the C.D.C. has encouraged Puerto Rico to increase](#).

"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 recently.

The 47 cases being reported in the U.S. Virgin Islands is 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.

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.

The World Health Organization and the C.D.C. have urged pregnant women against travel to more than 45 countries in which the Zika virus is spreading, mostly in the Caribbean and Latin America. All pregnant women who have been to these regions should be tested for the infection, health officials have said, and should refrain from unprotected sex with partners who have visited these regions.

The Zika virus has been linked to unusually small heads and brain damage in newborns — called microcephaly — in children born to infected mothers, as well as blindness, deafness, seizures and other congenital defects. In adults, the virus is linked to a form of temporary paralysis, called Guillain-Barré syndrome.