

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Zika Skyrockets In Territory As D.O.H. Reports 50 New Cases

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ST. THOMAS -- The number of new Zika virus cases affecting the U.S. Virgin Islands has surged by 50 this week, according to the Department of Health, bringing total confirmed cases to 193, with the bulk being in St. Thomas with 155, followed by St. Croix with 33, and St. John with 3.

So far D.O.H believes 17 pregnant women have been infected with the disease, which 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. However, D.O.H. says only 11 of those cases are confirmed while 6 are presumptive.

Zika is also known to be linked to a form of temporary paralysis, called Guillain-Barré syndrome, in adults.

In its continuing efforts to battle the virus, D.O.H. has planned two events that it's calling Zika Action Day, which will see the department, in partnership with Walgreens and other sponsors, offering a myriad of services in one place to help prevent the rapid increase of outbreaks and to provide pertinent information.

"Zika Action Day provides a unique opportunity for us to come together as a community and show our solidarity for Zika prevention and doing what is necessary to stop this virus from spreading," Health Commissioner Dr. Michelle Davis said.

The events will be held on Friday at Fort Christianvaern in St. Croix at 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and in St. Thomas the following day in the parking lot of Walgreens from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

To kick off the event Walgreens is offering free bags and coupons to the first 250 participants on each island. Walgreens will also give away \$20 gift cards on the hour to participants who visit each Zika booth. As if that was not enough to entice participation, Walgreens Manager Steve Marshall will be firing up the grill for hamburgers and hotdogs in the St. Thomas Walgreens parking lot.

On St. Croix, D.O.H. will be putting their grill master skills to the test too, and has invited local food vendors, professional face painters and hula hoop dancers to come out and show their support in the fight against Zika, according to the release.

Regarding D.O.H.'s outreach efforts, over 1,200 Zika prevention kits have been distributed to pregnant women throughout the territory and over 5,000 EPA approved repellents have been given out to the public as a whole. Additionally, 258 presentations have been conducted: 94 in St. Thomas, 147 in St. Croix, and 19 in St. John, D.O.H. says.

Feature Image: Carrie Abraham, 21, used mosquito spray before walking through the Wynwood neighborhood in Miami on Tuesday. Credit Scott McIntyre for The New York Times