

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Total Zika Cases Rise To 243 As Territory Sees 50 New Cases This Week

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Health late Tuesday made known that it recorded 50 news cases of the Zika virus in its latest report, bringing the territory's total to 243. Of that amount, 199 has been confirmed to be here, 40 in St. Croix and 4 in St. John.

Nineteen women have been presumed to have caught the virus, but D.O.H. says it's certain that 14 of them are confirmed positive. Altogether, there have been 761 cases reported, 438 have been confirmed to be negative, while 74 cases remain pending, according to figures provided by D.O.H.

D.O.H. Commissioner Michelle Davis said the territory is at the high point of the disease, and once that stage is passed, the number of cases should start to decrease.

"We are in the exponential phase of the epidemiological curve of the outbreak, which means every week we will have more positive results coming back. At some point the results will peak and then we will be on the other side of the outbreak and will then see a reduction in cases," Ms. Davis said.

"To date, three women who tested positive for Zika during pregnancy have delivered healthy infants. The Department of Health is monitoring these infants for up to 12 months to ensure they meet all developmental milestones. Based on current research, greater than 90 percent of all pregnant women who test positive for Zika will deliver an infant free from the development of microcephaly. Additionally, over 1,500 individuals have been tested for Zika in the territory and the majority of the lab results have been negative," she added.

D.O.H. said its recent initiative, dubbed Zika Action Day, held in St. Croix on Friday and here on Saturday, attracted over 1,000 people combined, and over 3,000 Zika prevention products -- including EPA approved repellents, larvicide dunks for standing water and female/male condoms -- were distributed. While there, Vector Disease Control International, a D.O.H. partner in fighting the disease, explained and demonstrated the mosquito treatment process, which resulted in 37 additional families scheduling appointments to receive larvicide and vector control treatment at their homes this week, according to D.O.H.

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 — 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.