

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Fifty-Six New Cases Of Zika Bring Territory's Total To 299; 20 Pregnant Women Have Tested Positive

Health / **Published On September 09, 2016 11:40 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Fifty-six new cases of the Zika virus brought the territory's total this week to 299, according to [the latest Department of Health report](#). The spike is the largest yet, and comes on the heels of Governor Kenneth Mapp [requesting some \\$5 million to help battle the disease](#).

Breakdown per island saw St. Thomas topping the list with 245 confirmed cases, followed by St. Croix with 47 confirmed cases, and St. John with 7 confirmed cases. D.O.H. says 20 pregnant women have tested positive for the disease, while one remains a probable case.

According to Government House, as a part of the efforts to fight Zika in the territory, the departments of Health, Planning and Natural Resources, and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, have each taken action to limit the spread of this virus. Having identified used tires as a problem source for standing water collection, the governor on June 16 submitted a formal request to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking for \$10 million to purchase two tire shredder systems. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the EPA have both advised that funding for these systems are tied to Congress's approval of the President Barack Obama's request of \$1.8 billion to mitigate and protect American citizens against Zika. But Congress has yet to act on the funding measure.

There are more than 300,000 tires stockpiled and it is estimated that another half a million more are lying in tire shops, on private properties and in remote areas across the territory, Government House says. These tires are a tremendous breeding ground for mosquitos. And while the Department of Health sprays the tires in the stockpile, many more remain a catchment for water.

To avoid the imposition of penalties under the consent decree covering landfills in the territory, the V.I. District Court is asking the U.S. Virgin Islands to spend \$1.5 million to remove approximately 300,000 tires. Mr. Mapp reasoned, "Removing some tires and leaving the others do not solve our problem."

Authorizing the \$5 million to acquire a system to permanently eliminate tires from all sectors of the territory would create a solution for tire disposal that would allow for the recycling of the pelletized rubber into asphalt mix that is used to pave and repair roadways, according to the release.

Last week, 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.

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.

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