

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With 62 New Cases Of Zika, Territory's Total Surges To 524

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ST. THOMAS -- The number of Virgin Islanders said to be infected with the Zika virus has surged to 524, according to the Department of Health's latest [surveillance report](#). The report found that 62 additional people were infected with the virus, which 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.

Pregnant remain confirmed to be infected remained unchanged from last week, according to the report, with a total of 48 cases, 35 of which are confirmed and another 13 probable, meaning D.O.H. is convinced that the women have been infected, but is awaiting more lab results.

As for breakdown per island, St. Thomas continues to see the most cases, with more than half of all cases -- 417 -- affecting the second biggest of the three Virgin Islands, followed by St. Croix with 78 confirmed cases, and St. John with 29.

[Recently](#), federal health researchers found that children who are infected with the Zika virus after birth rarely see serious complications. The study was published on September 30, and has been deemed a bright spot in the unfolding story of the virus.

About 160 teenagers and toddlers infected with Zika virus [have been reported](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 2015. The agency's new study marks the largest survey yet of laboratory-confirmed cases in children.

All of the infections were the result of travel, most commonly to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. About 100 of the cases occurred in June and July alone, according to the report, which represents just a fraction of the actual number of children in the continental United States infected with Zika.

The children, aged 1 month to 17 years, were initially identified because they had symptoms of infection; only those who became ill were included in the research. Yet most people who are infected have no symptoms at all.

The virus can profoundly injure developing fetuses, leading to a range of birth defects including irreparable brain damage, hearing loss and eye defects. But the C.D.C. researchers, reassuringly, found no serious injury among infected children.

Typically, these children got only mildly ill: 129 had a rash, C.D.C. researchers found, while half were feverish and a quarter had red eyes or joint pain. One hundred and eleven had two or more of the four main symptoms.

Five teenagers, ages 16 and 17, were pregnant when they developed symptoms, highlighting the need for sexually active teenagers to protect themselves from Zika, especially after travel to affected places.

None of these children developed a kind of temporary paralysis called Guillain-Barré syndrome, which may be triggered by Zika infection.

Older adults are generally thought to be at higher risk for Guillain-Barré. But at the height of the Zika epidemic in Brazil, officials reported that a few children had developed the paralysis, as well as meningoencephalitis, a dangerous inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.

Even so, the C.D.C. urged health care providers to test children with suspected Zika infection, to notify state health departments of all cases, and to remain vigilant for neurological complications even in the very young.

And although no child died in the C.D.C. study, two were hospitalized. A four-year-old with a fever, a cough, and trouble eating or drinking spent three days under observation. A one-year-old with a cough and rash spent a night in a hospital.

Feature Image: Dr. Natalia Brin examines a 2-month-old with suspected microcephaly in Brazil. Photo by Katie Worth/Frontline

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