

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Twenty-One New Cases Of Zika Brings Territory's Total To 657 As Virus's Momentum Slows

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ST. THOMAS -- The number of Zika virus cases confirmed in the U.S. Virgin Islands rose to 657, up by 21 from last week's 636, according to Department of Health's [latest surveillance report](#). The latest numbers, though up week-on-week, shows an encouraging sign as the virus appears to be losing steam.

The slowdown was predicted by D.O.H. Commissioner Michelle Davis, who [in August said](#) the virus was at that time at its high point in the territory, and that once peaked, cases would begin to decline.

“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.

Even pregnant women cases are trending down, with the number of confirmed cases rising by 6 week-over-week, compared to the [prior week's jump of 24 new cases](#).

D.O.H. Director of Public Relations, Nykole Tyson, explained to The Consortium last Thursday that D.O.H. was utilizing a new mechanism in its surveillance report, specifically the way it counts pregnant women. The prior strategy, she said, saw pregnant women being counted multiple times, which skewed the results. Therefore, testing for pregnant has been given its own designation in the weekly report, making for a clear distinction

As for breakdown per island relative to regular cases, St. Thomas continues to lead with 466 total confirmed cases, followed by St. Croix with 92, and St. John with 32.

Federal health researchers [recently](#) 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.