

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Zika Infection Rate Spike In Pregnant Women With 23 New Cases Reported In Territory

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Even as the Zika virus infection rate in the territory appears to be receding, this week, the Department of Health reported a spike in pregnant women cases, jumping from 120 positive cases last week to 143 positive cases this week, a jump of 23 new infections, according to the department's [latest weekly report](#).

But according to D.O.H. in a press release issued Thursday, the spike does not reflect a one-week increase; rather, this week's cases among pregnant women reflect infections that occurred in August to October, which D.O.H. said overlaps with the most active period of reported cases of Zika to date.

Overall, the number of cases reported this week, including pregnant women, totals 1087 on all three islands. St. Thomas continues to lead the infection rate with 649 positive cases, followed by St. Croix with 215 positive cases, and St. John with 80.

D.O.H. said since the onset of the outbreak, its top priority in its Zika response efforts has been to protect pregnant women by providing free mosquito control services at their homes, Zika prevention kits (including bed nets, repellents, condoms, educational materials, larvicides dunks and permethrin spray), and free Zika testing. D.O.H. said it activated its Emergency Operations Center (E.O.C.) on February 10, 2016 to coordinate a proactive response to the Zika outbreak. Since the E.O.C. was activated, D.O.H.'s Zika response activities have included:

- Partnering with a network of 12 clinics (vi.gov) and labs across the territory to provide free Zika testing services for pregnant women and anyone with Zika symptoms.
- Distributing 1,387 free Zika Prevention Kits to pregnant women throughout the territory.
- Conducting 369 outreach education events to the community and USVI clinicians; 191 on St. Croix and 178 on St. Thomas/St. John.
- Distributing over 10,000 EPA-approved repellents have been given out to the public to date.
- Providing free mosquito control services at the homes of pregnant women, as well as free mosquito inspection and treatment for all hospitals, clinics, schools, daycare centers, churches, for public places.

The department has also received support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). To date, CDC staff have completed 91 deployments to assist DOH with Zika response and DOH has hired four local staff through ASTHO to support the response long-term, D.O.H. said.

The department says it continues to partner with various community events to educate the public about Zika and provide prevention resources. On Saturday, D.O.H. staff provided free Zika testing, insect repellents and educational materials at the Bordeaux Farmers' Vegan Fair on St. Thomas. The department's staff are getting ready for the St. Croix Agricultural Fair, which is being held from February 18-20.

CDC recommends that all women living in an area with Zika be tested twice during their pregnancy, at the first prenatal visit and a second test in the second trimester. As a result of this recommendation, pregnant women in USVI are tested, even if they are not experiencing any Zika symptoms. Although Zika cases seem to be declining in USVI, DOH said it would like to remind residents that Zika is still in the territory, and encouraged everyone to continue taking precautions to prevent infection.

C.D.C. also recommended the following:

- **Dress**— wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- **Drain** – at least once a week, get rid of standing water in and around your home where mosquitoes can lay eggs

- **Defend** – use an EPA-registered insect repellent, and treat clothes with permethrin

For questions about Zika in USVI or to receive any of the DOH's free services, call D.O.H.'s Emergency Operations Center at 340-712-6205 or visit doh.vi.gov.

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