

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Zika, Losing Steam, Still Affecting USVI As Four Pregnant Women Are Confirmed To Be Infected In Latest DOH Report

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Ernice Gilbert **April 18, 2017**



The Zika virus, once an explosive disease in many parts of the world, including the U.S. Virgin Islands, has lost much of its momentum in the territory, but the virus continues to affect residents -- with 4 pregnant women confirmed to be infected week-over-week, bringing the total count for confirmed pregnant women to 223, according to the Department of Health's [latest report](#).

The report, which tracks the virus in the territory, shows an overall decrease week-over-week, with only one confirmed case aside from the 4 pregnant women. The single case

was reported in St. Thomas, bringing the island's total confirmed cases to 681. St. Croix and St. John remained flat with 250 and 88 cases respectively.

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [report](#), one in 10 pregnant women in the continental United States with a confirmed Zika infection had a baby with brain damage or other serious birth defects. The report also provided more evidence that the risk of birth defects was greater when women were infected in the first trimester of pregnancy.

Fifteen percent of women with confirmed Zika infection in the first trimester had babies with birth defects, the report found.

"It's an important report because it's a more complete cohort now, so we're getting a little more information," said Dr. Roberta DeBiasi, chief of pediatric infectious diseases for the Children's National Health System in Washington (via The New York Times), who was not involved in the study.

"It does answer that the first trimester is the worst," she said. "But you can't take away from this, 'Oh, as long as I'm not infected in the first trimester, it will be fine.'"

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, and 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.