

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Baby Has Been Born With Zika-Related Birth Defect Microcephaly In USVI, Dept. Of Health Confirms

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The Department of Health late Friday made known that a child was born with the Zika-related birth defect microcephaly -- the first recorded case in the U.S. Virgin Islands -- which was confirmed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) testing, according to D.O.H.

Health officials did not reveal on which island the baby was born.

Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is much smaller than expected. During pregnancy, a baby's head grows because the baby's brain grows. Microcephaly can occur because a baby's brain has not developed properly during pregnancy or has

stopped growing after birth, which results in a smaller head size. Microcephaly can be an isolated condition, meaning that it can occur with no other major birth defects, or it can occur in combination with other major birth defects.

Babies with microcephaly can have a range of other problems, depending on how severe their microcephaly is. Microcephaly has been linked with the following problems:

- Seizures
- Developmental delay, such as problems with speech or other [developmental milestones](#) (like sitting, standing, and walking)
- Intellectual disability (decreased ability to learn and function in daily life)
- Problems with movement and balance
- Feeding problems, such as difficulty swallowing
- Hearing loss
- Vision problems

"We are saddened to report this case; however, we are not surprised due to the high rate of local transmission in the territory," said D.O.H. Commissioner Michelle Davis. "The Department of Health stands ready to provide services to women, infants and families affected by the Zika virus. Although one case is too many, we must continue to remain vigilant in preventing infection through mosquito bites and unprotected sex; especially to pregnant women."

Dr. Davis went on to provide Zika prevention best practices.

"Avoiding mosquito bites is the best way to prevent getting Zika. This can be accomplished by dress, drain, defend. Dress-wearing long sleeved shirts, long pants; drain eliminating standing water in and outside of the home; defend-use of repellents, bed nets, condoms, and screens on windows and doors," she said.

The number of Zika cases in the territory has slowed, but cases in pregnant women continue to rise. In D.O.H.'s [April 18 report](#), an additional four pregnant women were confirmed to be infected with the disease, bringing the total number of infected pregnant women cases then to 223. According to D.O.H.'s [latest report](#), recorded on May 9, the total number of pregnant women in the territory who have tested positive for Zika is now at 232.

Dr. Davis said D.O.H. will continue to do its best to fight Zika, and listed a myriad of initiatives the department has put in place to minimize its spread. D.O.H. pointed out that out of the 232 locally recorded positive Zika pregnant women cases, there have been 105 births, one of which had microcephaly. D.O.H. also revealed that the territory has had one Zika-related fetal loss.

The department said it will continue monitoring case reports and outcomes based on two systems, 1) Care Coordination/Assessments, and 2) Follow Up. Derval Petersen, PhD, Director of Maternal & Child Health and Children with Special Health Care Needs (MCH), explained, "Care coordination is a system of patient/family centered care to connect the clients to services as needed, which may consist of audiology, neurology, vision testing and psychology." She added, "MCH will follow affected families through CDC established developmental guidelines, to insure the babies born to Zika positive women are meeting

their developmental milestones.”

D.O.H. said it has provided education to more than 75 health care professionals on St. Thomas and St. Croix, including physicians and nurses at Schneider Regional Medical Center and Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center. A focus of the outreach has centered on how to monitor pregnant women at risk for Zika virus infection, recognizing Congenital Zika Syndrome prenatally and at birth, the initial and long-term management of Congenital Zika Syndrome, and how to report concerns for birth defects to D.O.H.

The department has also provided general overviews of the virus, current numbers of reported cases in USVI, and preventive measures to reduce the risk of Zika infection in pregnant women and the community, according to information accompanying D.O.H.'s announcement.

D.O.H. said it has provided vector control to approximately 10,000 establishments territory-wide, including homes, businesses, schools, daycare centers, landfills and abandoned lots.

Pregnant women are strongly urged to take steps to prevent mosquito bites and protect themselves from sexual transmission of Zika throughout their entire pregnancy. If you are pregnant and showing symptoms of Zika, such as a fever, rash, red eyes, joint/muscle pain or headache, immediately talk to your doctor or healthcare provider. D.O.H. also encouraged pregnant women to take advantage of the following free products and services:

- Zika testing at 12 locations throughout the islands ([Click here for a listing](#))
- Zika Prevention Kit (ZPK) containing educational materials, insect repellent, permethrin, condoms, dunks to treat standing water, and a bed net.

There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika -- which is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. A pregnant woman can pass Zika to her fetus during pregnancy or around the time of birth. Men and women with Zika can pass it to their partners through sexual contact.

D.O.H. has a Zika hotline that residents can call for more information: 340-712-6205.