

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Six More Pregnant Women Test Positive For Zika Virus In D.O.H.'s Latest Surveillance Report

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While the Department of Health's latest surveillance report shows an increase of six new confirmed Zika cases in pregnant women week-over-week, the results also include some encouraging signs, as confirmed Zika cases in the regular category dropped on each island, albeit it marginally.

According to [this week's report](#), confirmed Zika cases in St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John were 681, 250 and 88 respectively. For [the prior week](#), the numbers stood at 686, 251 and 89.

The increase in pregnant women cases remains an issue, however, with 238 confirmed cases this week compared to 232 confirmed cases last week -- even as D.O.H. continues with its myriad of prevention and awareness programs. Two weeks ago, [D.O.H. revealed](#) that the territory had experienced its first case of the Zika-related birth defect microcephaly, which the department said was confirmed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) testing.

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.