Florida reports first three Zika virus cases

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Three cases of Zika virus, Florida's first, were recorded in people who had recently traveled in Latin America, health authorities said Wednesday.

The first two cases were found in Miami-Dade County, in people who visited Colombia in December.

The third case, in Hillsborough County, involved a person who traveled to Venezuela last month, Florida Health Department spokeswoman Mara Gambineri said.

"We encourage Florida residents and visitors to protect themselves from all mosquito-borne illnesses by draining standing water, covering their skin with repellent and clothing, covering windows with screens," Gambineri said.

No cases have yet been confirmed of infections contracted in the United States, though the virus has quickly spread across South America and the Caribbean in recent weeks.

The Zika virus, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, cannot spread between humans.

But for pregnant women, the virus can be transmitted to the fetus, triggering brain damage like microcephaly in which the brain and skull are abnormally small.

The virus often produces flu-like symptoms (fever, headaches and joint pain) as well as skin rashes and conjunctivitis.

Those symptoms appear within three to 12 days of the mosquito bite. In 80 percent of cases, the infection goes unnoticed, and it is very rarely fatal.

Last week, the United States warned pregnant women to avoid travel to 14 countries and territories in the Caribbean and Latin America because of the virus.

There have been 26 travel-related cases of Zika virus in the United States since 2007, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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