

# Florida gov offers free Zika test kits for pregnant women

August 3 2016, by Kelli Kennedy

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Florida Gov. Rick Scott ordered free Zika testing statewide Wednesday to help pregnant women.

Scott directed state [health officials](#) to make the tests available at county [health](#) departments and also said the state would provide additional lab services to handle the expected increase to ensure test results are processed quickly.

Health officials last Friday announced that mosquitoes have apparently started spreading Zika on the U.S. mainland, with a total now of 15 cases they strongly believe were caused by bites. In an unprecedented warning, [federal health officials](#) directed [pregnant women](#) to avoid a Zika-stricken part of Miami. The Zika virus can cause severe brain-related defects, including disastrously small heads, called microcephaly. Even if the brain appears to be developing normally, studies also have linked Zika to stillbirths, poor fetal growth and other problems.

Scott promised in a statement Wednesday to "aggressively fight against the Zika virus."

Wednesday's announcement comes as some doctors have complained they were being forced to ration test kits and turn away pregnant women who were requesting them.

"The biggest challenge I'm having is many, many, many patients who are pregnant want to be tested ... right now it just feels like we are restricting

access to the tests. Certainly patients have felt frustrated," Dr. Christine Curry, an ob-gyn at University of Miami Health System, said in a phone interview Tuesday night.

The free tests announced by the governor are only available at county health departments and do not apply to physicians in private practice.

The governor said more than 2,400 have been tested statewide and more than 140 people have been tested in the past three days in the impacted area of Wynwood, an area known for art galleries and hip shops and restaurants. He also announced increased spraying in the area and other mosquito abatement. However, federal health officials have said the mosquitoes have been harder to eradicate than they anticipated, leading them to suspect that the pests are resistant to the insecticides or are still finding standing water in which to breed.

Athenahealth, which specializes in [electronic health records](#), says it's proactively reaching out to patients and has partnered with a local community health center to call and email patients who may be at risk and encourage them to get tested. The company says its records have identified more than 1,800 patients being treated by 94 providers at 24 different clients within the affected area who are potentially at risk.

U.S. health authorities have said they don't expect major outbreaks in this country, in part because of better sanitation and the use of air conditioners and window screens. But experts cautioned that many questions about the virus remain.

Doctors say phones are ringing off the hook with questions from anxious pregnant women or women thinking about becoming pregnant. Doctors say it's been difficult to explain that the disease has multiple modes of transmission. That means that even pregnant women who thinks she is being proactive by staying inside all day blasting the air condition must

still wear a condom to avoid possibly getting the virus through an infected partner.

Adding to the confusion, most people who get Zika don't even know they are sick, but that doesn't mean they don't have the virus, said Curry. And what about those who aren't pregnant now but are planning to be in the short term?

"People will say, 'well, I don't want to be pregnant for a few years, should I get infected now with the hope of gaining immunity,' and then other people will say, 'gosh, I want to get pregnant in a few years what does it mean if I get infected now.' I think both of those questions have scientific gaps in them. We don't yet know a ton about the long term immunity for this disease."

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