

USVI steps up fight against mosquitoes amid Zika outbreak

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This 2006 file photo provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows a female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in the process of acquiring a blood meal from a human host. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is behind the large outbreaks of Zika virus in Latin America and the Caribbean. On Friday, July 29, 2016, Florida said four Zika infections in the Miami area are likely the first caused by mosquito bites in the continental U.S. All previous U.S. cases have been linked to outbreak countries. (James Gathany/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention via AP, File)

The U.S. Virgin Islands announced Tuesday it is stepping up its fight against mosquitoes amid what officials in the U.S. territory say is a significant Zika outbreak.

Health officials said a company hired by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will use an organic larvicide and eliminate any potential breeding areas as part of a one-year contract. Crews will inspect and treat hospitals, schools, churches and daycare centers that request service on all three islands, as well as any public areas where [mosquito-borne diseases](#) have thrived.

"The Virgin Islands is in the midst of a significant outbreak, and we are doing everything possible to get to the root of the issue," said Health Commissioner Dr. Michelle Davis.

The U.S. territory of more than 100,000 people is reporting nearly 80 Zika cases, 58 of them on St. Thomas, 20 on St. Croix and one on St. John. Officials are concerned that the actual number of people with Zika is much higher because eight of 10 people who get it have no symptoms.

Ten pregnant women have tested positive, a concern for authorities because Zika has been linked to severe birth defects. No cases of a temporary paralysis condition known as Guillain-Barre linked to Zika have been reported, health department spokeswoman Nykole Tyson said in a phone interview.

She said the Virgin Islands is using the larvicide Vectobac WDG to fight the spread of the mosquito-borne virus.

Other nearby islands including Puerto Rico are facing a Zika epidemic. Puerto Rico recently announced it would use the larvicide Bti to fight Zika, with nearly 6,000 cases reported in that U.S. territory.

But the highest number of Zika cases is found in the eastern Caribbean. The French Caribbean island of Martinique has nearly 34,000 cases, including 447 pregnant women. Guadeloupe has nearly 25,500 cases, including 343 [pregnant women](#).

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