

First Miami zone of local Zika spread now 'clear': officials

September 19 2016

Health authorities Monday lifted a travel warning for the Miami neighborhood of Wynwood—site of the United States' first local Zika outbreak—after the governor declared no evidence of active transmission of the virus there in the last 45 days.

However, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention still urged pregnant women to consider postponing all non-essential travel to south Florida's Miami-Dade County as a precaution.

The threat posed by Zika is far from over in the United States. On Friday, Florida officials tripled the size of the area of Miami Beach where Zika is actively spreading locally.

Florida has counted more than 835 cases of Zika, which can cause devastating birth defects, including microcephaly, when an infant's brain and skull are abnormally small and malformed.

The United States and its territories have tallied 20,870, according to the CDC.

But on a small scale, the news was positive in Wynwood, the popular arts district that was the first area in the country to report evidence that Zika was spreading locally in a section about one-square mile (2.5 square kilometers) in size.

"No new cases of locally transmitted Zika have been reported in the

Wynwood-designated area since early August," said the CDC in a statement.

"And low numbers of mosquitoes have been found in traps there for the past several weeks since aerial application of the larvicide Bti and the adulticide Naled."

Therefore the federal agency modified its August 1 warning which urged women who want to become pregnant or who are pregnant to avoid travel to the Wynwood neighborhood, north of downtown Miami.

'Fight not over'

Wynwood was considered an area of active Zika virus transmission from June 15 to September 18, 2016.

Anyone who traveled to the area in that period "should wait at least eight weeks before trying to get pregnant," said the CDC.

Even though the travel warning has been lifted, the CDC continued to urge pregnant women and their partners who live in or travel to the area to take steps to avoid mosquito bites.

"Pregnant women and partners of pregnant women who are concerned about potential Zika virus exposure may also consider postponing nonessential travel to all parts of Miami-Dade County," added the CDC.

"While today's news is great, the fight is not over," said a statement by Florida Governor Rick Scott.

"We have more than 93 cases of locally acquired Zika in Florida and on Friday, we extended the Miami Beach Zika zone to an area of about 4.5 miles."

Eighteen babies in the United States have been born with Zika-related birth defects.

Scott also lamented the government's inability to agree on a funding package for Zika.

"Florida may have been the first location to have locally transmitted Zika, but we will not be the last," he said.

"I expect Congress to immediately pass a funding bill."

US President Barack Obama asked for \$1.9 billion in emergency funding in February.

Lawmakers have been unable to agree on a smaller, \$1.1 billion measure to pay for preventive measures, research into vaccines and to assist women whose fetuses are infected during pregnancy.

Zika can be spread by the bite of a mosquito or via sexual contact.

There is no vaccine to prevent it.

Often, the symptoms are mild and include body pain, red eyes and a rash.

Four out of five people report no symptoms at all, making the infection particularly difficult to prevent.

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