

Mosquitoes infect pregnant Florida woman with Zika

By Matthew MacEgan
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Two weeks after the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) announced that 14 mosquito-contracted Zika cases had been found in southern Florida, the count has increased to 22, including a pregnant woman in her early 20s. This woman and two of the other new cases have no clear connection to the “warning zone” in Wynwood, Florida, where all of the initial cases were found.

While the pregnant woman and one of the other two cases did come from Miami-Dade County, where Wynwood is located, the other case is a man from neighboring Broward County. Both of the men work in businesses in Wynwood, but not within the one-square-mile warning area. One of the men purportedly has co-workers who travel to Brazil frequently, where the Zika epidemic has been centered since last year.

Eighteen of the positive cases have come from within the warning area, including four new cases on Tuesday and a fifth on Wednesday. Most of these have reportedly been connected to a small area where several businesses are located, including those connected to the two men described above.

On Monday, a new case was reported in Palm Beach County, expanding the outbreak to three Florida counties. The FDOH has begun conducting a door-to-door investigation in that county, similar to what they did in Wynwood. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that single isolated cases were expected.

Overall, 1,825 confirmed cases of Zika exist on the US mainland, but most of these are related to travel to Zika-infected areas. These areas are notable for their extreme poverty and lack of infrastructure that could protect people from such an outbreak. That the virus has spread to the continental US says something about

the social conditions there.

The young pregnant woman, for example, who recently contracted the virus, was unemployed and living with her boyfriend in a rooming house with no air-conditioning or window screens. The high temperatures and humidity levels in southern Florida during the summer months mean that many people who cannot afford central air-conditioning, or the high electric bills that come with air-conditioning units, are forced to open their windows and use fans. This puts them more at risk for mosquito bites.

The woman in question was 23 weeks pregnant and went to the emergency room on July 7 after feeling ill for three days. Medical staff determined that she had symptoms of Zika. This case is particularly troubling because Zika is more dangerous for pregnant women because it can damage the development of the brain of a fetus. One child has already been born in New Jersey with microcephaly, a brain disorder related to Zika. Out of 403 positive cases in Miami-Dade County, 57 infections involve pregnant women. Within the continental US, 479 pregnant women have been infected, and a further 901 pregnant women have also been infected in Puerto Rico.

Officials have continued collecting urine samples in the affected areas as well as distributing leaflets on how to prevent an infection. According to the leaflet, a mosquito can bite an infected person, perhaps someone who traveled to a location where the Zika virus has been circulating, and then bite another person, spreading the virus in a new area. Residents have been instructed to eliminate standing water, use insect repellent, and put screens on open windows and doors.

The CDC claims that the disease will not be as easily transmitted within the United States because many Americans live in air-conditioned, mosquito-free

homes. However, in the current worsening economic crisis, those who cannot afford such amenities are more likely to contract the Zika virus, making it a disease of the impoverished.

After stating last week that Florida is still open for business, Governor Rick Scott is now saying that no one “should take this lightly.” He says that his office has an outstanding request for 10,000 Zika-prevention kits for pregnant women and is planning on working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the future.

The Obama administration stated Thursday that it will transfer \$81 million to maintain Zika vaccine research that would otherwise run out of funding at the end of August. The ongoing project still needs an additional \$500 million to fully fund its research through 2017.

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